

One Fine Day

by kate811

Category: Nanny  
Genre: Humor, Romance  
Language: English  
Characters: Brighton S., CC B., Grace S., Niles  
Pairings: CC B./Niles  
Status: Completed  
Published: 2016-04-07 23:44:51  
Updated: 2016-04-20 02:24:09  
Packaged: 2016-04-27 22:11:16  
Rating: K+  
Chapters: 10  
Words: 26,119  
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net  
Summary: After getting locked out of the mansion, CC, Niles, Brighton, and Grace are forced to spend a busy summer day together.

## 1. Chapter 1

**\*\*Author's Note: Things I once swore I'd never do: 1. Write a Nanny fic that takes place in Season One, and 2. Write another fic heavily featuring the children. I failed on both these things with this fic. This is based off the George Clooney Michelle Pfeiffer rom com of the same name, and I had to make it set in Season One because that's when Brighton and Grace were at their cutest.\*\***

**\*\*I dedicate this to Jilian (aFineMess5) because she has heard me talk about writing this for approximately 147 years, and because she is a wonderful friend who deserves all the croissants this world has to offer.\*\***

**\*\*Also! This fic is actually completely finished, so I will be posting a new chapter probably every other day (10 chapters total.) I hope you all enjoy!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 1<strong>:</p>

"Chester, stay!" CC commanded as she exited the office at the Sheffield mansion, balancing the dog's leash in one hand and her briefcase, cell phone, and stack of manila folders and scripts in the other.

The little dog paid her no mind as he continued running in circles, his leash tangling up in her stilettos and sending her flying head first through the swinging doors into the Sheffield living room. CC

braced for impact as she let go of the leash and her belongings and careened towards the marble floor, when a pair of hands caught her at the waist and a sturdy chest caught her face.

CC nearly smiled in gratitude until she caught sight of to whom the sturdy chest belonged.

"Isn't it a little early in the day to be boozing it up, Babcock?" Niles asked, an amused smirk playing on his features.

CC pushed herself off of him, flicked her hair out of her face, and smoothed out her cream-colored, short-sleeved sundress. "It's that stupid mongrel you and Maxwell got me for my birthday. He's trying to kill me."

"While I would just love to take credit for anything that's trying to kill you," Niles said as he brushed off his light blue polo. "Chester was entirely Mr. Sheffield's idea."

"You expect me to believe that?" CC asked as they both watched the dog unsuccessfully try to uproot a potted plant in the corner.

"Of course. I like dogs. Why would I want to give one to Cruella de Vil? Aren't you going to stop him?"

"Why should I?"

"He'll make a mess. I'm going to be out all day and I don't relish the thought of coming home and-"

"Having to actually do some work?" CC supplied with a smirk. "He's too little to knock it over, anyway. That thing's not going anywhere."

With a shake of his head, Niles headed for the front door, calling up the stairs to the children, "Master Brighton, Miss Grace, we're going to be late for camp!"

The pitter-patter of feet bounding down the stairs caught Chester's attention for a moment, but he quickly returned his focus to the plant. CC, confident she still had a few more moments before the dog's attention would shift elsewhere, picked her things up off the floor (God forbid Niles helped her with that) and began organizing her briefcase for the day when her phone rang.

"CC Babcock. Oh, hi, Melanie," she greeted, her voice quickly transforming from serious businesswoman to faux-sweet schmoozer.

"Brighton, give that back!" the little one shrieked as the boy tossed her stress ball in the air out of her reach.

"You can't catch me," the boy sing-songed obnoxiously.

"Children, here are your lunches. Do you have your bags?" Niles instructed, ignoring their quarrelling.

"You can't catch me, you can't catch me," the boy continued to tease.

"Brighton, give me my ball back!" Grace demanded.

At the sound of the b-word, Chester's ears perked up.

"Yes, I remember. 1:30 is fine," CC said into the phone. "Yep, that's the coffee shop next to the theatre, right? I got it."

"Master Brighton, give your sister the ball back," Niles said as he opened the door.

"Oh, fine. Here, take it," Brighton said mischievously as he threw the ball just past his sister's outstretched hands and out the door.

Before CC could process what was happening, Chester zoomed past her, the children, and Niles, flying out the door like a speeding bullet.

"My ball!" Grace cried.

"My dog! Niles, get him!" CC yelled. "Melanie, I have to go, I'll see you later. Kiss, kiss," she quickly snapped her phone shut and took off after the butler and two children, running as fast as her cream-colored stilettos would let her.

The four ran frantically down the street after the tiny dog, nearly colliding with one another when Chester stopped abruptly to sniff at a pretzel vendor.

"Chester!" CC cried as she scooped the little dog up off the ground.

"That dog," Niles bit out between gasps of air as he doubled over, "is a menace."

"Seriously, Niles. Hop on a treadmill every once in a while, would ya?" CC called over her shoulder as she headed back toward the mansion, Brighton and Grace following closely behind.

"All this over a stupid ball, and it didn't even go that far," Brighton groaned as he picked up the stress ball by the wrought-iron fence out front of the mansion and tossed it to his sister.

"He hasn't mastered the art of fetch yet," CC said with a defensive sniff.

"He's been too busy watching his mom beg for treats and lick herself," Niles said as he caught up with the group. "Into the car, you two. We don't want you to miss the bus. Babcock, I trust you can manage to lock up?"

"Yeah, I just need to grab my briefcase." She turned and headed for the front door, pulling the handle. "It's locked. Give me your key."

Niles patted down the pockets of his dark gray trousers and looked at her uneasily. "My key is still in the house; all I have is the spare key for the car," he turned to the two children. "Do either of you have a key to the house?"

Both children shook their heads.

CC sighed, annoyed she'd be without her briefcase for the day. "Fine. Just give me money for a cab."

"I'm afraid my wallet is still inside, too."

"Of course it is."

"Well I was in such a rush to get your dog I didn't have time to grab anything!"

"Uh, guys?" Brighton interrupted. "We're gonna be late."

CC looked at Niles expectantly.

"Fine," he huffed. "I'll drop you off after I drop them off."

"Good Butler," she said, batting her eyelashes sweetly.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, this is just great," Niles deadpanned as they watched the school bus drive off into the distance without Brighton or Grace on board.<p>

CC bit her tongue to keep from remarking that had he gone the way she told him to, they would have arrived 5 minutes earlier.

"Go ahead and say it," Niles sighed.

"It's okay. The look on your face is reward enough. I don't need to say I told you so." CC grinned. "I did though. I did tell you so."

"Oh man, we were going swimming in a lake today, too! Oh, well." Brighton pulled out his Gameboy and sat on the curb. Grace joined him, squeezing furiously at her stress ball.

"What are we supposed to do with the children?" Niles bemoaned, rubbing his face tiredly.

"Woah. Since when is this a '\_we\_' problem? \_You're\_ dropping \_me\_ off at the theatre, and then \_you're\_ dealing with the kids before \_you're\_ picking \_me\_ up when I call for \_you\_," she waved her phone at him, grateful she at least grabbed that before they got locked out and that Niles had found Maxwell's spare cell phone in the car.

"I can't watch them! I have things to do today!" Niles said defensively.

"Like what?" CC asked, furrowing her eyebrows in genuine confusion. "The house is locked. It's not like you can sit around watching soap operas and smoking Maxwell's cigars."

"For your information, I teach a cooking class in the mornings and afternoons. The summer has been so quiet with the children going to camps and the family taking so many vacations, and it's decent pay. And then later this afternoon I have—" he trailed off, mumbling something unintelligible under his breath.

"What was that?" CC asked.

He mumbled again.

"I must have misheard you, Niles, because I could've sworn it sounded like you just said you have to audition for a butler choir today. But you can't possibly be that sad, can you?"

He blushed.

CC laughed wickedly. "Oh this is too good to be true. What are they called? The Musical Maids?"

He didn't answer.

"Come on, you have to tell me now."

"Oh, fine. They're called The Singing Servants. There. Are you happy?!"

"Blissfully happy."

"So you'll help me figure out what we can do with the children?"

"Not that happy."

Niles groaned.

"Look," CC said with an eye roll. "Where's Nanny Fine anyway? Why isn't she dealing with this?"

"Do you ever listen to anything that goes on in the house?" Niles asked.

"Not if it doesn't directly involve me, no," CC answered honestly.

"Miss Margaret has been away at piano camp in Connecticut. Mr. Sheffield and Miss Fine went up to hear her final recital."

"That makes sense," CC nodded sarcastically. "We live right by Julliard and NYU, so they send the girl to Connecticut for music lessons. Though I suppose it's for the best; at least we can't hear her from there. This is just great though; now we have no one to watch the kids."

"I can't believe I'm asking this, but is there any possible way you could take them today, Miss Babcock?"

"I can't believe you're asking that either," she said with a raise of an eyebrow.

"Well it's YOUR DOG'S FAULT we're in this situation in the first place! Anyway, what do you have going on today? Dress rehearsal?" Niles asked exasperatedly.

"Yes, and then I have an interview in the afternoon. But it's right by the theatre so I can walk there."

"An interview?"

"Yes, an interview."

"What for?"

"Playbill."

"Why would they want to interview you and not Mr. Sheff-oh," Niles said as realization dawned on him. "Oh, I know why you're getting interviewed. This is because of that set designer who called you the Bitch of Broadway to the press, isn't it? You're doing damage control!"

"Maxwell insists I 'restore my image' - whatever the hell that means. That set designer started it!"

"Didn't he need stitches after you were through with him?"

"How was I supposed to know there was a nail in that piece of plywood?"

"Why did you have to hit him over the head with plywood?!"

"We're doing The Sound of Music and he had the Von Trapp mansion looking like Studio 54! And then he copped an attitude and said some truly offensive things when I told him so."

"Fine. So neither of us can watch the children. Do you know anyone who could look after them for the day?" Niles asked, unable to conceal the desperation from his voice.

"Oh, sure," CC answered, flipping open her cellphone and browsing through it sarcastically. "I always keep Mary Poppins on speed dial just in case I have to babysit my boss' kids. Really, Niles, who the hell would you have me call?"

"I know this is a foreign concept to you," Niles explained very slowly and deliberately, as if talking to a small child, "but some people form emotional bonds with other people of like minds and similar interests. They get together in social gatherings. They may even do favors for one another occasionally. These people are known as friends." He finished his explanation with a nod and a proud smile that promptly vanished from his face when he noticed the look CC was giving him.

"Are you finished?" she asked impatiently.

"I suppose so."

"As I was saying, none of my friends are responsible enough to handle children. It's nearly 9am. Half of them are already on their third martini of the day and the other half are doped up on pain meds from their most recent face lifts and before you say anything they're not my real friends and I'm nothing like them so you can just keep your big trap shut," she finished breathlessly, determined to get her explanation out before the butler could interrupt with an insult.

Niles closed his mouth, clearly fighting back a smile. CC rolled her eyes.

"So what the hell are we going to-Master Brighton, let go of your sister's hair!" Niles scolded.

CC watched as the boy let go of Grace's ponytail and an idea came to her. "Sisterâ€|that's it! I'll call my sister! She doesn't do anything during the day! She could watch them."

"You just said all your friends are drunk or recovering from plastic surgery," Niles reminded her.

"DD isn't my \_friend\_, she's my \_sister\_. Besides, she had work done last month."

"And alcohol?"

"DD doesn't start until brunch."

"Great," Niles sighed. "Oh well, it's better than nothing. Give her a try."

CC dialed her sister's number. Four rings went by. Five. Six. On the seventh ring, she almost gave up and hung up, when a groggy voice answered.

"Hello?" the woman murmured tiredly.

"DD? DD, it's CC."

"Who?"

"CC. Your sister."

"Chas?" DD asked, slowly getting her bearings. "Christ! What the hell are you doing calling me? It's the middle of the night!"

"It's 9:00 in the morning."

"Yeah, well when you get home at 4am, 9 IS the middle of the night!"

"What the hell were you doing out until 4am on a Thursday night? Never mind, I don't want to know. I need your help."

"Can't you call Noel?" DD whined.

"I haven't even told you what I need help with yet."

"Right. Sorry. Go on."

"I need you to babysit the Sheffield kids for me for the day. They missed the bus to camp, and Maxwell and the nanny are out of town, and I have to go to work."

"I can't do it. Today's my spa day."

"Can't you cancel?"

"It took me MONTHS to get this appointment, CC! \_Months!\_ I'm not going to give it up. I can't! Victor is the best masseur in town. And my eyebrows need reshaping."

"Well, what about one of your maids? Can't they do it?" CC pleaded desperately.

"They're busy for the day. I'm hosting a dinner party. All of Manhattan's wealthiest will be here tonight."

"Thanks for the invite."

"You wouldn't have come anyway!"

"Whatever. What does this dinner have to do with your staff not being able to watch the kids?"

"They need to clean the house and get dinner ready. There's no way they can look after children on top of all that! I will not have tonight be anything less than perfect!"

"DD, please, I have no one else to turn to!"

"Looks like you'll have to take them to work with you. Honestly, Chas, why did you even bother having kids if you weren't going to be able to take care of them?"

"They're not my-"

"I have to go exfoliate before my massage. Kiss, kiss!"

"DD, wait! They're not my kids!"

The line went dead, and CC snapped her phone shut, shooting Niles a stubbornly defeated look.

"Every question I've ever had about you was just answered," he said with an amused raise of an eyebrow.

"Oh, stuff it, Stouffer's! There's gotta be someone who can watch them. Sylvia?"

"Sylvia is having a procedure done today."

"Oh," CC nodded knowingly. "Gastric bypass?"

"No, she's having her bunions shaved down." The two shuddered simultaneously.

"Well, what about Val? As dumb as she is, surely she can keep a couple of kids alive for a few hours."

"Val works."

"You mean someone in Nanny Fine's life actually has a job and \_isn't\_ on board the Sheffield gravy train?" CC raised her eyebrows. "I'm impressed. I have a newfound respect for Val."

"We could always call Yetta?"



"Niles, I may be willing to pawn these kids off on just about anyone, but I draw the line at dropping them off at a retirement home and asking a woman who still thinks she's taking the maiden voyage of the Titanic to watch Maxwell's children."

Niles sighed. "You're right, as loath to admit it as I am."

"What about you? Don't you have any friends you can call? Ha! Listen to me! I made a joke," CC cackled, slapping her own knee. "Friends! Your only friends outside the house are the bag ladies down at Save A Lot! Hey, do you think one of them could do it?"

"No, they couldn't do it. Today's their bridge day," he answered before he could stop himself. "Oh, shut up."

CC wiped tears of mirth from her eyes. "You make it too easy. Anyway, isn't there like, a Butler's Association or something? Can't you ask one of them?"

"All the butlers I know are old and decrepit."

She pretended to consider his words for a moment, giving him the once-over. "Well that makes sense. Like minds and bodies often flock to one another."

"Then why aren't you off in a tank at Sea World with the rest of your kind?" Niles smirked.

"Have fun watching the kids for the day, Niles," CC called over her shoulder, turning and heading down the street away from him.

"Wait, wait, I'm sorry!" he said as he caught up with her, grabbing her elbow and dragging her back toward the children. "Look, how about we each take one of the children? They won't be too much trouble, especially separated. We can meet up in the afternoon after my second class and your interview. Master Brighton has a baseball game and then Miss Grace has a friend's birthday party, but I can probably figure out a way to get you back inside the mansion before all that. Please, Miss Babcock, I'm desperate! And I'll owe you one."

He looked at her hopefully. Well, she did like when people owed her one. Especially pathetic butlers who lived to make her life a living hell.

"Fine! Give me whichever kid is less of a pain in the ass," CC snapped impatiently.

"That'll be Miss Grace."

"Hey!" Brighton cried defensively. Niles shot him a knowing look. "Yeah, okay. That's fair," he conceded.

"Grace?" CC wrinkled her nose. "But she's so little. Is she even housebroken?"

"Potty-trained," Niles corrected.

"Same difference," CC said disinterestedly, picking an imaginary piece of lint from her dress.

Niles pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "No, you see, that's where you're wrong. Potty-trained is an expression specifically meant for children. Housebroken is a term used for animals. You understand that, correct? It's important to me that you can make that distinction if I'm going to leave a small child in your care for the day."

"Fine, fine, whatever. Is the kid potty-trained?"

"Yes."

"Great. Drop us off at the theatre."

Niles and Grace exchanged worried glances.

"This oughta be good," Brighton said with a grin.

## 2. Chapter 2

**\*\*Author's Note:** I was gonna post every other day, but I literally have no self control when it comes to posting fics. I hope you enjoy! Pretty sure this is the shortest chapter of them all, so we're getting that out of the way early.\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 2<strong>:

After a not-so-quick detour to an exclusive doggy hotel for Chester that luckily knew CC and would let her pay once she picked the dog up, Niles dropped the two girls off at the theatre, a glower on his face the whole drive over.

"Thanks again for making me incredibly late, Babcock. Really, I appreciate it."

"Well I can't watch Chester all day and you can't watch Chester all day so what would you have me do?! Your students will be fine. Just teach them how to order take out like you do most nights anyway," she called to him with a wave of her hand, cackling as she saw which finger he held up at her before speeding off.

"Such a drama queen," she sighed cheerfully before turning to Grace. "Anyway, you can entertain yourself, right?"

Grace merely nodded.

Good. The little one was quiet. They'd be fine.

They entered the theatre and CC held back a smile as the crowd literally parted for her as she made her way to her customary spot in the second row. Being feared never got old. Grace took out a coloring book and some crayons and set to work. CC snapped her fingers and a crewmember handed her a script and a red pen.

"Places, people! We've got 3 weeks til opening night!"

The show started off okay, with CC only making a couple nuns cry, when the scenery changed to the von Trapp mansion.

"Stop, stop! What the hell is this?" she asked, getting up on stage, not realizing Grace was trailing behind her.

"It's the new set," someone on stage crew explained.

"Why is there so much floral?" she looked around in disgust at the hideously patterned floral designs on the walls and furniture.

"I happen to like floral," a cocky voice answered as a man sporting a bandage on his forehead entered from stage left.

A gentle tug on her dress startled CC, who looked down and met Grace's eyes.

"Is that the guy you hit over the head?" the child whispered.

CC nodded, still surprised the child had followed her. "You should go back down to your seat, Grace. I need you to be out of harm's way, in case I hit him over the head again."

The girl let go of her dress, and CC immediately regretted saying what she said, knowing she could potentially scare the child. But Grace surprised her again by impishly grinning and backing up, presumably heading back to her seat.

"Oh, marvelous, CC. They let you around children? Try not to inflict too much emotional trauma," the designer said condescendingly.

"This is supposed to be 1930's Austria, not the Rose Parade! Not to mention Captain von Trapp is a very serious man. He had rules against singing, and the children had to wear uniforms. His house would reflect that. It looks ridiculous. Frankly, it sucks. The kid could do a better job designing this scenery with her coloring book and crayons. You will fix this." CC demanded.

"I will not!" the set designer stomped his foot like a petulant child. "The show opens in 3 weeks!"

CC rolled her eyes. "Yeah, and with a set this ugly, people will be rooting for the Nazis."

"You know, I was right. You really are the Bitch of Broadway."

The crew around them gasped and went silent. CC narrowed her eyes, ready to strike back, when the sound of a splash caught all their attention.

Everyone turned to center stage, where Grace had picked up a gallon of white paint and threw it right on one of the set walls.

"See?" CC smirked. "I told you the kid could do a better job."

The set designer's face turned an ugly shade of red. "You little brat! How dare you?!"

He made a beeline for Grace. CC stormed after him. He raised a hand and yanked on the can of paint with his other hand, and Grace flinched but did not let go. CC saw red. "That's Maxwell Sheffield's child, you imbecile. You'll never work in this town again!"

CC punched him in the face just as Grace let go of the paint can. The pain splattered all over the set designer as he fell backwards, crashing right through the von Trapp mansion's front door " also hideously designed with the floral pattern.

She watched in fascination as the set began to sway. Instinctively, she picked Grace up and jumped down off the stage as the scenery began crumbling to the ground. The cast and crewmembers pushed each other to get out of harm's way. Mother Abbess burst into tears. Captain von Trapp took a swig from his flask. Someone fell into the ropes and the curtains came cascading down. It was pure chaos. It was beautiful.

CC turned to one of the second-in-command set designers who hadn't pissed her off yet. "You. You're in charge of scenery now. Don't make me regret my decision." She picked up Grace's things with her free hand and headed for the exit. "I'm taking the day off."

Once they were outside, CC put the girl down, crouching in front of her and looking for signs of injury. "Are you okay?"

Grace laughed, nodding her head. "Yeah, that was so cool!"

"You're not upset by what happened?"

"No, that guy was a jerk and you showed him! I hope he's crying," Grace said with a mischievous glint in her eye.

CC laughed, shook her head, and stood back up, flipping open her phone and dialing for her ride.

"What?" Niles answered tersely.

She held out her phone, a little taken aback. He couldn't \_still \_be mad about being late for his class. "Oh, well hello to you, too. I need you to pick us up."

"I'm a little busy at the moment," he said, his voice strained. CC heard a horn beep. She looked around at the relatively quiet street and realized it came from the phone on his end.

"Why? Where are you? Why are you in your car? What are you do-"

"Look, something suddenly came up," Niles cut her off.

"'\_Something suddenly came up?\_' Who the hell are you? Marcia Brady? If anything I'd think you were Alice Brady. What happened?"

"Alice's last name wasn't Brady," Niles answered.

"Well, whatever. She was a maid, you're a maid. It works-wait a second," she paused, shaking her head. "Stop distracting me! We need a ride!"

"I can't pick you up right now. Besides, weren't you going to be there til this afternoon?"

"Yes, but then \_something suddenly came up\_. Come pick us up."

"I. Can't."

"Fine, leave me and the little one to wander the streets full of rapists and murderers," CC said with a dramatic sigh, quickly shaking her head and reassuringly patting Grace, who looked terrified, on the head.

There was a long pause, and CC knew she won.

"We'll be there shortly."

She grinned victoriously, "Fabulous! Hey, what are we gonna do for lunch? I'm starving."

"We'll worry about lunch later. First we have to make a pit stop at the doctor's office."

"Doctor's office? Are you okay? What happened?"

"You'll see," Niles said ominously and hung up.

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell happened?" Niles and CC asked at the same time as he pulled up and got out of the car right as medics wheeled the set designer " who was holding an ice pack to his head and covered in white paint " by on a stretcher to an awaiting ambulance.<p>

"A difference of opinions," CC said with a blasÃ© wave of her hand.

"Are you okay, Miss Grace?" Niles asked as he crouched down in front of the child, checking for any signs of physical or emotional trauma.

"I'm fine! It was so cool! The set designer called CC the Bitch of Broadway and I threw paint on his ugly set and he went after me so CC punched him and the set fell down!" Grace explained excitedly in one breath.

"The set fell down? Miss Grace, are you injured?"

"Really, I'm fine! CC picked me up and we jumped off the stage before anything fell! It was awesome!"

Niles looked up at CC, who shrugged nonchalantly.

"Well, I suppose I should thank you for saving Miss Grace."

"It wasn't a big deal. I should thank Grace for putting that set designer in his place. Now why do we need to go to the doctor's?"

Niles' eyes widened and he got up and opened the car door. "This is why," he said flatly as he motioned to Brighton.

"He looks fine to meâ€|.oh," CC said as she caught sight of the boy's face.

"Brighton got a grape stuck up his nose!" Grace giggled.

"Shut up, Gracie!" Brighton yelled.

"Why in the hell would you stick a grape up your nose?" CC asked, a note of amusement in her voice.

"He was probably trying to recapture his youth by acting out," Grace explained.

"I was bored! I wanted to see how far I could shoot one out of my nose," Brighton cried. "Niles can we hurry up? My nose hurts."

"Of course it hurts. You've got a grape shoved up there. Your nostril is probably all stretched out and you'll have uneven nostrils for the rest of your life," CC patted him on the shoulder faux-comfortingly as Brighton looked up at her, a horrified expression on his face.

"That's not true is it, Niles? IS IT?"

Niles sighed as he slid into the driver's seat. "It's like having 3 children with me. Miss Babcock, stop teasing the poor child and let Miss Grace into the car. Master Brighton, I'm sure your nose will be fine."

"And even if it's not, we'll get you the best plastic surgeon money can buy," CC said soothingly.

"Babcock!"

"What? I was being sincere that time!"

Niles glared at her through the rearview mirror and she held up her hands in surrender. She backed out of the car and allowed Grace to get in before sliding into the front passenger seat as Niles took off.

The minutes ticked by in tense silence, when suddenly Grace started giggling. Brighton immediately followed suit. CC glanced back at the children and let the reality of the events of their morning come crashing down on her and she laughed, too. Niles' grip on the steering wheel relaxed, and soon enough he joined in on the laughter.

### 3. Chapter 3

**\*\*Author's Note:** Again, I have no self-control. But I also know tomorrow (Sunday) is my busy day, and I won't be updating again until Monday. So here's a short little chapter until then. Special thanks to RVS for your absolutely beautiful reviews â€" they seriously made my day (and I love that the one line reminded you of The Golden Girls! That's high praise in my book.) I hope you all enjoy!\*\*

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 3:<strong>

"Stop fidgeting," Niles snapped impatiently.

"I'm not fidgeting," Brighton answered defensively, perched on top of the examining table as they waited for the doctor to return.

"I wasn't talking to you," Niles said to the boy. He then looked pointedly at CC, who was pacing back and forth in the small room.

"I'm fine," CC said.

"I didn't ask if you were fine. I said stop fidgeting. You're making everyone uncomfortable, which I understand is your norm, but think of the children, would you?"

"She's exhibiting signs of White Coat Syndrome," Grace explained.

"In English, Miss Grace?"

"Doctors' offices make her nervous."

"They do not!" CC exclaimed with a stomp of her foot.

Grace was proved right as the door opened and the doctor walked in, startling CC enough to let out a yelp. Niles looked at her knowingly.

"Oh, shut up," she muttered to him.

"Okay, Brighton, we're going to remove the grape from your nose now," the doctor motioned for Niles and CC to come over and stand by the boy. "If you two wouldn't mind, could each of you hold one of his hands, just to keep him calm?"

"Is it gonna hurt?" CC and Brighton asked at the same time.

"It'll be over in a second," the doctor said as he held up a large pair of forceps.

CC looked at the forceps. Then she looked at Brighton's nose. Then she looked back at the forceps.

Then she fainted.

\* \* \*

><p>"What the hell happened?" CC moaned as she opened her eyes to Niles and the doctor kneeling on either side of her and Grace and Brighton, now sporting a grape-free nostril, standing over her.<p>

"You saw the huge claw the doctor used to get the grape out of my nose and you went down," Brighton said with a thumbs-up. "He took out the grape while you were passed out â€" we figured it'd be for the best if you didn't see it happen."

"I passed out?" CC asked worriedly.

"I'll say. You shook the whole room when you hit the ground."

Registered at about a 7.0 on the Richter scale. They're checking the building for structural damage as we speak." Niles said somberly.

CC opened her mouth to retort, but the room was spinning and her head was swimming preventing her from thinking of a good enough insult, and she closed her eyes in defeat.

"Well, that can't be good," Niles said. "Normally she'd insult me back."

CC smiled and felt a warm hand on her forehead. She assumed it was the doctor checking for injuries, but it felt nice anyway.

"Miss Babcock? I want to check you out real quick before I let you stand up. Can you open your eyes and follow the penlight for me?"

She reluctantly opened her eyes, shocked to discover that it was Niles' stroking her forehead, not the doctor. He quickly removed his hand, and she quickly shook off how good it felt and focused her attention on following the doctor's penlight.

"Good. Any dizziness? Headache?"

"I do feel a little dizzy," she admitted. "I was dizzier when I first opened my eyes though, and the back of my head hurts a little."

"Probably from where you hit it when you fell. Do you feel okay to stand?"

"I think so."

The doctor and Niles each took a hand and helped her up, and Niles groaned as his knees cracked upon standing up.

"Seriously, Niles. Treadmill. Just a few times a week. It'll make a world of a difference," she trailed off as she began to sway, nearly toppling over again.

For the second time that morning, CC found herself in Niles' arms.

"A difference," she finished into his chest.

"Will someone be able to look after her for the day?" the doctor asked, clearly ready to move on and see actual patients. "Otherwise, I'm going to have to admit her to the hospital."

"Yes, she'll be with me for the rest of the day." Niles said, followed by an "I'm on dog-sitting duty," muttered in a playful, singsong-y voice under his breath for only her to hear. She let out a soft laugh.

The doctor gave him instructions and signs to look for in case she had a concussion, reminded Brighton not to stick things up his nose, and left. CC picked her head up off of Niles' chest, surprised to find him looking at her, studying her actually.

"Better?" he asked, his brows furrowed in concern.



"Yeah," she nodded, pushing off of his chest with both hands. "I think it's passed."

"We should get some food in you."

"How are we going to do that? Neither of us has any money and before you open your big mouth don't you dare suggest I work my usual street corner."

Niles' eyes lit up. "Fine, but I have it on good authority from Big Leon that there isn't much you wouldn't do for a Klondike Bar. Anyway, with all the excitement with Brighton's nose and you once again assaulting a set designer, I forgot to tell you! I found \$50 in the glove compartment! Mr. Sheffield must keep it in there for emergencies, and I'd say this definitely constitutes an emergency. The children have their packed lunches from camp, so we only need to worry about feeding ourselves."

"Oh, good."

"Though of course I don't know how much I'll get to eat after I pay for your meal. Tell me, Babcock, how much does slop in a trough usually run you?"

"Niles, that's no way to talk about your cooking! Though it is accurate," she batted her eyelashes faux-sweetly at him, the movement making her dizzy once again. "Ugh, nevermind. Just get some food in me before I keel over again," she said, closing her eyes to stave off the dizziness.

"You sweet talker, you. I bet you say that to all the guys."

She opened an eye to glare at him.

"Right. Let's go then," Niles said, shuffling the children out of the exam room, turning to look back at her. "Do you need a hand?"

"What?"

"You know, because of your lightheadedness."

"No, I'm fine," she took a step and swayed a little to the side.

Niles was immediately at her side. "You don't seem fine. Let me walk you out, Miss Babcock."

"Oh. I don't know," she eyed him warily.

"Relax. I'm not going to trip you or make you hit your head again, as entertaining as that sounds. Just come on," he held out his arm.

"Fine," she said with a dramatic huff, taking his arm and letting him lead the way, fighting back a smile the whole way out.

**\*\*Author's Note: I'm so excited you guys seem to be enjoying this! Thank you for the reviews. Here's chapter 4. I'll probably post chapter 5 tomorrow, because, again, I have no patience.\*\***

\* \* \*

## <p><strong>Chapter 4:<strong>

They settled on a picnic in Central Park, Niles having found a spare blanket in the trunk of the car. Brighton and Grace burned off some excess energy tossing a baseball around, Niles went off in search of a vendor for lunch, and CC took a seat on the blanket. She slipped off her shoes and leaned back on her hands, letting the sun warm her face. Minutes later, the children ran back to their spot, red-faced and winded from playing. They reached into their backpacks for their water bottles and took a seat on either side of her. An awkward silence took over.

"So, Brighton, are you ready for your game today?" CC asked for lack of anything else to say.

"What do you care?" the boy asked suspiciously.

"Well, you have me there," CC said with a shrug. "I really don't care. But it's better than sitting here in uncomfortable silence, isn't it? So answer the damn question. Are you ready for your game or not?"

It was Brighton's turn to give a noncommittal shrug. "I don't know. I want to be. But I'm not. Not really."

"The pitcher for the other team is mean to him," Grace explained.

"What do you mean he's mean?" CC asked, eying the boy in concern.

Brighton shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it."

CC looked back at Grace questioningly.

"He's bigger and older than Brighton and he picks on him at school and stuff," the little one supplied.

"Do Maxwell and Nanny Fine know?" CC asked.

"No, it's stupid. It's not a big deal. And anyway, how would Dad or Fran know what to do?" the boy asked with a defeated shrug.

"Well, you've got a point there. Your father isn't exactly known for his confrontational demeanor. That's my job. And Nanny Fine..." CC shook her head, figuring insulting their beloved nanny wasn't the best course of action to take. "Anyway, look, when you're at bat, just focus all your frustration from him into hitting the ball. Maybe you'll knock it out of the park and make him look bad."

"And if that doesn't work?" Brighton asked.

"Just respond to every mean comment he makes with 'That's not what

your mom said last night,'" she said with a wink.

Grace giggled and Brighton looked at CC with newfound respect, nodding in approval at the insult and joining in on his sister's laughter. She found herself smiling, surprised by the fact that she was enjoying herself with children, and furthermore, that they seemed to be enjoying themselves with her.

"I shudder to think what you've said to elicit this sort of response from them," Niles said as he returned to their spot wearing an amused expression on his face.

CC squinted up at him, a hand shielding her eyes from the sun. "What took you so long?"

"Well, I had to traipse around searching for food that met your one requirement. Do you know how hard it is to find vendor food served by someone who doesn't look like a registered sex offender in Manhattan?"

She stared up at him blankly.

Niles sighed. "Of course you don't. Anyway, I found these," he said as he sat down on the blanket, setting down two plates of hot dogs and two sodas. "The man serving them seemed clean and respectable, and we still have plenty of money left over should we need to figure out dinner."

"No fair! You guys get hot dogs while Gracie and I are stuck with our boring old lunches," Brighton cried. "Not that we don't love your peanut butter and jelly, Niles," he added as an afterthought.

"Peanut butter and jelly? I haven't had that since I was a little girl," CC said with a fond smile.

"Well by all means, have at it," Brighton said, offering her his lunchbox.

"Oh, what the hell. It's probably better for me than all that processed meat anyway," she said as she traded lunches with the boy.

Niles looked down and was met with the puppy dog eyes of Grace. "Oh, alright, fine. Go to town," he sighed as he handed over his lunch to the little girl and accepted her lunchbox.

"Uh, is it too late to trade back?" CC asked with a wrinkle of her nose as she pulled out a baggy of grapes from Brighton's lunchbox, much to the merriment of the other three who promptly burst into laughter.

\* \* \*

><p>The children scarfed down their lunches in record time and asked to go feed the ducks with their leftover hot dog buns. They ran to the pond, and once Niles was sure they were still within viewing distance, he turned his attention back to CC, furrowing his brow as he watched her pick the crust off her sandwich. "What are you, 4?"<p>

She blushed. "This is how I ate them when I was a little girl!"

Niles shook his head, chuckling to himself. "I can just see this miniature version of you in a business suit with a brief case snapping at your cook for not cutting the slices off your peanut butter and jelly."

CC laughed airily. "Something like that, yeah. Why do you think I'm so good at negotiating contracts? I used to talk my Nanny Bobo into an extra dessert with my lunch almost every day, and I always won."

"Oh crap," Niles muttered as his eyes widened and he glanced down at his watch. "Speaking of dessert, we need to go. I have my Baking for Beginners class in 15 minutes!"

"Wait," CC shook her head, "you have another class today?"

He nodded. "Normally I just stay there in between classes, but today we had the emergency grape situation, so here I am."

CC looked down at her watch, quickly shoving the rest of the sandwich in her mouth. "Don't you have your audition soon, too?" she asked with a full mouth.

"Ah, if your socialite friends could see you now," he said teasingly with a wrinkle of his nose. "Yes, but it's at the same place. That's how I heard about it," he explained as he gathered up the trash from their lunch and got up.

"But I have my interview this afternoon," she said as she slipped her shoes back on and followed him to the trashcan. "I thought we were just going to your audition and then heading to my interview."

He stopped in his tracks. "Oh. Well then, I just won't audition."

"Really?" she asked uncertainly.

"Sure, there's always next year," he shrugged. CC studied him. To the untrained eye he would have appeared genuinely indifferent. However, when it came to the butler, she was very much trained, and she knew he was disappointed.

"You know what? I'll make some calls," she said as they got to the trashcan. "I'm sure we can push the interview backâ€"

"You don't have to do that, Miss Babcock," Niles interrupted.

"I know I don't," she said, as she threw her trash out and brushed her hands off casually. "But I'm going to, so don't argue."

"But you're being interviewed to prove you're not difficult to work with! Won't this prove just that?" he asked worriedly.

"Who cares?" she shrugged. "Anyway, I just said no arguing, so shut your mouth and accept my offer, because I never do anything nice for anyone, especially not for you," she poked him in the chest and gave

him a mockingly stern glare.

Niles pantomimed zipping up his lips. "Thank you," he said with a grateful smile.

"You're welcome. Hey, wait a minute. Wait a minute," she shook her head as a thought occurred to her. "What the hell are the 3 of us supposed to do while you're teaching a class filled with people who had nothing better to do on a Friday afternoon than learn how to crack an egg? I can't watch the both of them!"

"Well, you managed to keep Miss Grace in one piece this morning."

"Hey," CC said defensively. "I did a better job than you did with the boy! Grace didn't stick anything up her nose, did she?"

"No, but the two of you did destroy an entire Broadway set," he pointed out.

"When I win the Tony for best scenery, you'll eat your words, Easy-Off."

"Fine, fine. Be sure to thank me in your acceptance speech," he said distractedly as he gathered up their things and motioned to the children; they headed for the car.

"As if I'd thank anyone aside from myself in my acceptance speech," she said haughtily as she got into the passenger side.

Niles opened the door for the kids, laughing to himself. CC turned around and narrowed her eyes in suspicion at him. "What?"

"Nothing," he said with a shake of his head as he shut the door and got behind the wheel. "It's just that most people at least pretend to be humble and gracious. It's almost refreshing that you don't put on any false pretenses about it."

"Oh," she mumbled. "Well, thanks, I think."

He smiled and started the car, pulling out into traffic. "Anyway, I was thinking you three could just come to the class. We're baking cupcakes today."

"Do we get to eat them?!" Grace asked excitedly from the backseat.

"Of course you do," Niles answered.

"Baking?" CC scrunched up her face. "Niles, I don't know how to bake!"

"That's the funny thing about classes, Miss Babcock. They're meant to teach people skills they don't already have," Niles said sarcastically. "Anyway, it's a beginners class. You're not supposed to know how to bake."

"Come on, Miss Babcock, it'll be fun!" Brighton chimed in.

CC glanced at the children's' eager faces in the rearview mirror and

sighed. "Okay, fine. We'll all go to the class."

Brighton and Grace cheered.

"But," CC held up a hand, "absolutely no sticking anything up anyone's noses! Got it?"

The children agreed, and Brighton blushed, rubbing his nose at the memory.

"Good," CC nodded in satisfaction.

"That goes for you, too, Babcock," Niles teased. "Though I could see the appeal of feigning a medical emergency to get out of seeing the class sample whatever terrible concoction you manage to whip up."

"Oh, go shove a whisk up yourâ€" CC snapped her mouth shut, remembering her audience. She peered up at the mirror, relieved to see Brighton engrossed in his Gameboy and Grace staring absentmindedly out the window. She braced herself for a lecture from the butler, glancing at him guiltily.

Niles surprised her by laughing, his eyes twinkling in amusement. "Please, Miss Babcock, we're all used to your foul mouth by now. I'm just impressed you even know the word 'whisk.'"

CC fought back a smile, shaking her head in fake exasperation. They lapsed into a comfortable silence until they pulled up to the community center and parked. Niles gathered up the children and their belongings as they got out of the car, and CC rolled down her window, holding up her cell phone.

"I'll be right in â€" I just need to call the journalist to reschedule. Pick us out a good work station and there better be NO tampering with my oven, Niles, I swear to God!"

"Drats," Niles snapped his finger regrettably. "That would have been such a good idea!"

"And no messing with my ingredients either," she added.

"Well, now you're just taking all the fun out of this for me," he muttered.

"Keep in mind, as the teacher you have to sample my finished productâ€" she trailed off.

"What are you saying, Babs? I have to be nice to you or you'll poison me."

"Drats," CC said, mimicking him, accent and everything. "That would have been such a good idea!"

"Evil! You are pure evil!" he cried, clutching his chest for dramatic effect as he ushered the children inside.

"You better believe it, baby," CC called with a playful wink, snickering triumphantly as Niles' cheeks reddened and he turned and tripped up the last step.

## 5. Chapter 5

**\*\*Chapter 5\*\*:**

CC strode into the cooking classroom, her heels clicking purposefully on the linoleum tile. She glanced around the room and spotted Niles and the children. As she approached, she noticed the apron the butler was wearing: white with red letters proclaiming \_Kiss the Cook. \_Red lips decorated the entire apron as if to drive home the point.\_  
"That's cute," she said flatly.

"Thank you. Don't get any ideas though," Niles replied as he tossed her a plain, red apron and motioned towards the children. "There's your work station."

CC smiled as she saw the children's miniature aprons and chef hats.  
"You guys look great!"

The kids smiled, both already sporting chocolate-y mouths from sneaking chocolate chips.

"Save some for the cupcakes," Niles mock-scolled, then turned to CC.  
"Did you get your interview changed?"

"Yep! We pushed it back an hour. Have me there for 2:30."

"Yes, Your Highness," Niles said with a dramatic bow.

"Thank you," CC batted her eyelashes sweetly and turned to put her apron over her head. She struggled to tie it, and nearly jumped when she felt Niles' hands over hers on her back.

"Let me do it before you start cursing the apron out. I'd like to return the children to Mr. Sheffield not completely corrupted."

She rolled her eyes and relented.

"How the devil did you manage to already get this tangled into a knot?" Niles asked in amusement, struggling against the knots.

CC shrugged innocently.

"Wait," Brighton interrupted. "If your interview is at 2:30, what about my game?"

She felt Niles' hands still, and a feeling of dread settled in the pit of her stomach. "What time is your game?"

"3:00," Brighton and Niles said at the same time.

"Dammit," she swore under her breath. "Well, I guess you guys could just drop me off and I'll hang out at the coffee shop until it's over?"

"You're not gonna come to my game? Butâ€¦but what about all the stuff you taught me today. You won't get to see it."

If a few days ago someone had told her that Brighton Sheffield would

care about her missing his baseball game, she would have had them committed. But he did, and CC couldn't believe it, but she cared, too.

"I'm sorry, Brighton. I don't want to miss it â€" believe me, I don't. But this interview is really important to the business."

"It's okay," the boy said dejectedly, looking down and rearranging the utensils by means of distraction.

CC cast her eyes downward too, feeling like the world's biggest disappointment. She felt a hand on her shoulder and turned her head, not realizing Niles was still standing behind her from tying her apron. She met his eyes and he smiled softly and squeezed her shoulder comfortingly.

"I won't go to my audition," he offered. "You can call back and change the interview time andâ€" "

"No, I can't keep changing the time. Then I really will be labeled difficult to work with in the article. Thanks though," she sighed in disappointment. "This sucks."

Niles let go of her shoulder and finished tying her apron. "Well, what if we wait for you to be done your interview? Sure, Brighton would be a little late, but this way you could still come to the game to cheer him on."

CC and Brighton exchanged hopeful glances. "That works for me," she said. "It's up to you though, Brighton. Do you mind being a little late?"

"No, not really," the boy perked up a little. "It's better than nothing, right? I need you there â€" you're my good luck charm!"

CC laughed. "How can I be your good luck charm when I haven't even been to one of your games yet?"

"Just a feeling," Brighton shrugged and went back to sneaking chocolate chips with his sister.

CC stood dumbstruck for a moment. Normally she had two types of relationships with the Sheffield children: dislike or indifference. She rarely had conversations with them, and here she was spending the whole day with them, and they were genuinely enjoying each other's company.

"Personally, I think the boy is mistaken. You've been nothing but a bad luck charm to me all these years, Babs," Niles' breath tickled her ear and startled her; he was still standing right behind her.

She turned around to face him, raising an eyebrow. "Oh, I don't know about that, Niles. You're the world's worst butler, and Maxwell still employs you, no matter how hard I beg him to fire you. That's gotta count for some good luck."

Niles shook his head and laughed. Realizing the classroom had filled up during their discussion, he quickly took his place at the front of



the room. "Good afternoon, class! Today we'll be learning how to bake cupcakes."

"You guys ready?" CC asked the children.

"Yeah!" Grace cheered.

"Let's do this!" Brighton added, picking up the flour

"I want to pour the flour!" Grace whined, reaching for it.

"Too bad! I got to it first! You couldn't do it anyway â€" it's too heavy!" Brighton held the bag just out of the little girl's reach.

"But I saw it first!" Grace argued, reaching again. She managed to get hold of it, and a tug-of-war ensued.

CC was hit with flashbacks of that morning, how their fight over a ball had led to utter chaos. "Guys, knock it off. It's just flour, for the love of God! Someone pour it before the bag-

As if on cue, the bag ripped, sending a cloud of flour into the air and all over CC.

"-Rips," CC finished her sentence.

No one spoke at first, with CC mentally counting to ten to avoid exploding and the children staring at her in pure fear.

"Towel?" Brighton offered, sheepishly holding up a dishrag.

"Oh, give me that," CC said through gritted teeth, snatching the rag out of his hand.

"And how is everything going over here?" Niles stopped in his tracks as he approached their workstation and caught sight of CC.  
"Woah."

"Yes. Woah," CC echoed, furiously rubbing the flour off her face.

"What happened?" Niles asked.

"Tug-of-war over the flour," she said as she continued trying to wipe the flour off her body. "Somehow I lost, even though I wasn't playing."

"That's not shocking â€" this is you we're talking about, after all," he said with a teasing smirk on his face. He quickly morphed his face into a stern one, though, and scolded the children. "Children, what do you have to say for yourselves?"

"Sorry, Miss Babcock," the children said, looking genuinely apologetic.

CC sighed. "It's fine. At least my dress is sort of white." She shook her head. "I'm honestly not surprised this happened, what with the day we've been having."

Seeing that she had relaxed, Niles couldn't resist making a comment. "Just tell everyone your cocaine habit has gotten out of control. No one will bat an eye."

"Very funny," CC deadpanned, throwing the dishrag down on the counter.

"Come to think of it, that's actually probably more believable than a baking accident gone awry," Niles continued as though he didn't hear her.

"Brighton, hand me that kitchen knife," CC said, as though she didn't hear him.

"Okay, okay, I'm shutting up now," Niles surrendered. "I should get back to the rest of my students anyway. You can borrow flour from one of your neighbors."

He got a few steps away when he turned back around. "Oh, Babcock?"

"What?" She asked suspiciously, not trusting the playful glint in his eyes.

"You missed a spot."

He managed to duck just in time to avoid the egg CC threw at his head.

\* \* \*

><p>"Well, here we are: the moment of truth," Niles announced as he stopped by their workstation.<p>

"Oh please, we know you saved the best for last," CC replied cockily, holding out her hands for Brighton and Grace to slap her high five.

"I did save you for last," Niles conceded. "But only because you're staying with me after class. No sense in keeping the rest of the class waiting."

"Whatever, Betty Crock-of-shâ€" Once again CC's mouth snapped shut just in time.

Niles shook his head, that familiar twinkle in his eyes again. "At least you're stopping yourself before you actually say the bad word. That's progress for you."

She nodded in agreement.

"Hey, Niles, can you try our cupcakes already? We're dying here!" Brighton pleaded. Grace did her best puppy dog eyes for dramatic effect.

"Okay, okay," Niles said, holding up his hands in defeat. He grabbed a fork and a knife. "Here goes nothing."

"You eat your cupcakes with a fork and knife?" CC asked incredulously.

"I had to sample 10 different cupcakes today!" Niles said defensively. "I just want a little sliver, otherwise we'll be going back to the doctor for my newly developed diabetes."

"Still, that is not how you eat a cupcake," CC said, taking the cupcake off his plate and waving it in his face. "Just take a bite."

"But then no one else can have the rest of the cupcake," Niles argued.

"So? We made a dozen," CC pointed out. "Now shut your mouth and open up."

Niles smirked. "Those two commands are contradictory."

"Whatever," CC said with an eye roll. "You know what I mean. Now come on and take a damn bite of the cupcake!"

"No, I'm using the knife and fo-oomph," the cupcake smashed into his open mouth, frosting smearing all over the lower half of his face. Niles glowered at her as best as he could with a mouthful of cupcake and reluctantly took a bite.

CC pulled the cupcake away and grinned victoriously as the children cracked up. "There. That wasn't so bad was it?" She batted her eyelashes sweetly.

Whatever comment Niles was about to make died on his lips as CC ran her finger through the frosting of the cupcake he had taken a bite from. Slowly, she slid her finger into her mouth and closed her eyes, moaning in pure ecstasy. She pulled her finger out of her mouth with a satisfying pop.

"God, I don't care what you have to say, Niles. These are damn good cupcakes! We deserve an A for these."

"Iâ€¦um, well it's not a graded class," Niles said dumbly, as he wiped his face with a towel. He shook his head to snap himself out of it. "But if it were, you three would definitely be passing with flying colors. These cupcakes are delicious."

CC, Brighton, and Gracie whooped in triumph, and the children promptly dug into their cupcakes. Once the desserts were inhaled, Grace pulled out her coloring books and crayons, and the children went to work coloring. Niles went to work cleaning up the classroom. He looked up when he heard a chair being slid back from a counter, and he was surprised to see it CC wiping down the counters.

"Baking and cleaning? I've turned you into a domestic," Niles said dramatically. "This is like My Fair Lady told in reverse."

"Don't flatter yourself," CC said. A slow grin spread across her face and she added, "'enry 'iggins."

Niles burst out laughing. "Your Cockney accent is almost as bad as Dick Van Dyke's."

CC laughed and went back to wiping down counters.

"Seriously, Miss Babcock, you don't have to help."

"Well I know that," she said with a huff. "But the faster this room is clean, the faster you can get to your audition, then the faster I can go get interviewed, and the faster we can get to the boy's baseball game."

"I suppose that's true. But you have your interview scheduled already, so it's not like it matters."

"I've been interviewed by Melanie Parker before," CC said with a casual wave of her hand, the rag slapping against the counter. "She always shows up early, that way she can see me come in and describe how I look. I can just see it now: '\_CC Babcock charges into the coffee shop, her cream-colored Manolo Blahnik stilettos clicking purposefully on the tiled floor. She looks the picture of a woman on a mission as she scans the room, hands on her hips. Her eyes land on the prey: me, and her usual frown morphs into a dazzling smile as she turns on the charm\_.'"

"Well," Niles said, an impressed smile on his face. "If Mr. Sheffield fires you for today's catastrophe with the scenery, you have a bright future in journalism, Miss Babcock."

CC laughed and nodded self-deprecatingly. The two continued wiping down counters, working their way from the outside in.

"So, what's your audition song?" she asked, breaking the silence.

He shook his head. "I'm not telling you. You'll just make fun of me."

"I will not!"

"Yes you will! It's your M.O."

"Niles, I'm a Broadway producer. I know what makes a good audition and what makes a bad one," she said confidently, adding, "I might even be able to help."

Niles' eyes narrowed in suspicion. "That's trueâ€|but you're not going to like the song I chose."

"Try me."

"It's an Andrew Lloyd Webber," he said with a cringe.

CC shrugged. "That doesn't surprise me. He has lots of good audition songs. If you tell Maxwell I said that, I will cut out your tongue."

"Your secret is safe with me," he paused. "Well, in that case, I'm doing Music of the Night from Phantom of theâ€"

She held up a hand to cut him off. "No you're not."

"What? Why not?"

"Because every guy does Music of the Night. Plus, it's not right for

your voice," she said exasperatedly. "I told you I know what I'm talking about! You need to stand out! You want to make this Domestic Diva group or whatever it's called, don't you?"

"Singing Servants," Niles muttered. "And yes, I do."

"That's what I thought," she leaned a hip against a counter and studied him, fingering her pearl necklace pensively. Suddenly, her face lit up. "I've got it! Do you know The Impossible Dream from Man of La Mancha? That would be absolutely perfect for you!"

"Yes, I know the song, but how do you know it's right for my voice?" Niles asked her warily.

"Because I've known you for what? 10 years?" She did the math mentally and nodded. "I've definitely heard you humming around the house as you're rearranging flowers or whatever it is that you do all day. Plus, again, I know what I'm doing, Niles. I'm damn good at my job, even though Maxwell still gets all the credit and I don't even get to have a desk in our office."

"Okay, okay," he waved his rag in a show of surrender. "I will sing the song."

"Of course you will," she said cockily.

They met in the middle, every counter spotless from a job well done. She tossed her rag at him, and he caught it easily. "Thank you for your help, Miss Babcock."

"Thank me afterwards, when they accept you on the spot," she waved him off.

He smiled and turned to get the children and their belongings when CC stopped him.

"Oh, and Niles? One more piece of advice."

He turned back around.

She strolled up to him, a playful smirk on her face. "Don't go up on stage with chocolate on your face." She wiped the corner of his mouth with her finger.

He gulped.

"That's better," she murmured, the smirk spreading to a brilliant smile that lit up her whole face. "Now, you go get ready for your audition. I'll get the kids ready. We'll see you in there. Break a leg!"

She turned around and sauntered back to the children, Niles watching her hips sway the whole way.

He shook himself out of it. "Wait a minute â€" you'll \_see me in there\_?! You will not! There is \_no way\_ you are watching me audition! No way!"

**\*\*Author's Note: Sorry for the delay. The website was acting up, but it seems to be working now.\*\***

\* \* \*

## <p><strong>Chapter 6:<strong>

CC ushered Brighton and Grace to the last row of seats in the dark auditorium, a smug smirk still plastered on her face due to winning the argument with Niles over getting to watch his audition. The smirk morphed into an '\_O\_' as she realized how long the line of auditioning butlers was.

"I didn't know this many people still had butlers," Brighton remarked as the three of them sat down, CC in the middle.

CC nodded in agreement. "A lot of socialites going without their lunchtime martini today."

"Including you?" Brighton said, grinning impishly.

"No, I usually wait til dinnertime. I need a clear head to make sure your father doesn't do anything stupid. Occasionally I'll have a glass of wine if-Oh, God," CC groaned when she realized he was teasing her, and she gave him a nudge. "Very funny. You've spent too much time around Niles growing up."

Brighton nodded as his grin shifted to a more pensive look. "Yeah, I guess I have. When my mom died he kind of took over, since my dad couldn't really deal."

CC froze, unsure of what to say next. She rarely talked to the kids about anything, and she certainly never talked to them about something as huge as Sara's death. She was completely out of her element.

She was spared from having to say anything when Brighton starting laughing. "I remember when Niles taught me my first prank: how to tape signs to peoples' backs without them knowing."

"Yes, I remember. I walked around the theatre all day with a sign on my back that said 'If Found Please Call Animal Control Immediately. Do Not Attempt to Approach Animal,'" she tried to sound angry, but she could not fight the laughter bubbling up inside her. The children's giggles set her over the edge.

The laughter died down, and Brighton grew contemplative again. "Miss Babcock?"

"Yes?"

"You were around a lot too, back then I mean, after she died."

CC smoothed her dress out over her knees to keep from wringing her hands nervously. "I was," she said slowly, carefully, trying to decide what exactly to say. "Your father was in no shape to run the business back then, and I didn't want it all to fall to pieces."

"Yeah, but that's not what I meant. You were around a lot for us back then, too."

Her head snapped up, and she looked at the boy in surprise. She didn't think anyone remembered that.

"Were you close with my mother?" Grace asked.

"We went to college together. She was my best friend," CC smiled wistfully at the girl. "And I was around because I wanted to make sure you kids were okay. For her."

"I remember you rocking Grace to sleep a lot," Brighton said.

CC nodded, looking at Grace. "You were just a baby when your mom died, so you didn't really understand where she went. You spent a lot of time with me â€" I think I reminded you of her. Of course, I had no idea what I was doing, so I don't know what good I did you."

"I think she turned out okay," Brighton joked, lightening the mood a little.

"Hey, she held her own against an evil set designer today! I'll say she turned out more than okay!" CC shot a quick smile at Grace and then turned back to the boy. "Meanwhile, you spent the most time around Niles, and today you stuck a grape up your nose."

She held out a hand, and the little girl gave her high five, laughing at her brother's misfortune.

"Alright, alright. You got me there," Brighton conceded. "So," he added, a mischievous glint in his eye. "If I grow up to be a criminal, we can blame Niles?"

"Sure," CC shrugged. "I find it best to blame Niles for most things anyway."

The three exchanged conspiratorial grins, when a man got up on stage and cleared his throat into the microphone, introducing himself as Martin the Choir Director and announcing that auditions were beginning. Wearing an all black ensemble, complete with a beret and cape, it was clear that Martin took himself very seriously. CC held back a snort of laughter, managing to turn it into a fake coughing fit.

"If we could have complete silence, that would be lovely, otherwise you can leave," Martin said as sashayed off the stage with a dramatic flick of his cape.

CC sank down in her seat and covered her mouth so she wouldn't be kicked out of the auditorium. She looked around and locked eyes with Niles, who was shaking with silent laughter. Just as she was sure she'd explode in laughter, the first singer took center stage, and a familiar song began playing: Music of the Night. Niles' jaw dropped and he shook his head in disbelief, but he managed to shake it off and shoot her a grateful, relieved smile for convincing him to change his audition song before returning his attention to the stage.

"Hey, Miss Babcock?" Gracie whispered.

"Yes, Gracie?" CC whispered back.

"Do you think one of these days you could tell me a little bit about my mother?" the child asked.

"Really?" CC asked, feeling very much like her heart was literally melting.

"Yeah. I think it'd be nice to hear from her friend. You could provide a unique perspective," Grace said, and CC was reminded of how wise the girl truly was.

"Absolutely. I would love to," CC said once she found her voice.

"Could I come, too?" Brighton asked. "I mean, I remember her, butâ€"

CC placed a hand on his shoulder. "Brighton, of course you can come."

"Thank you," the children replied, soft, grateful smiles on their faces.

"You're welcome," she whispered, blinking back the unexpected tears pricking her eyes. Once again she looked up and made eye contact with Niles, who was looking at her questioningly. She shook her head, feigning what she hoped looked like indifference. He eyed her, remaining unconvinced. CC looked away, turning her attention back to the stage, where a burly man in a suit was singing Tomorrow from Annie.

"Well, that's a first."

\* \* \*

><p>When <em>Music of the Night<em> was sung for the fifteenth time, CC looked over at a flabbergasted Niles, shooting him a knowing smile. She loved being right.

The repeated song was starting to get to everyone. Some butlers had given up on waiting in line, unable to take hearing the song one more time. CC was glad she was used to lousy audition days, and the children didn't seem to mind. Brighton was engrossed in his Gameboy and Grace was in her own little world, coloring in her coloring book.

Martin held up a hand to stop the audition, the pencil in his hand snapping in half due to the grip he had on it. He removed his beret, revealing a shiny, bald head. Once again, CC and Niles fought back laughter. But then Martin stood and turned to address the remaining butlers. "That's it! I've heard enough, and I've chosen enough spots. Auditions are over! Those who didn't get a chance to audition are welcome to try again next year!"

The crowd murmured to each other and some shouted in protest, but Martin was adamant. CC's heart sank as she watched Niles' shoulders droop. The rest of the butlers gave up quickly, whether out of politeness or apathy, and they quickly gathered up their belongings and left. Niles followed behind, dragging his feet and sinking into



the seat next to Brighton.

"Niles, Iâ€" CC started.

"It's fine, Miss Babcock," he said dejectedly. "I apologize for wasting everyone's time this afternoon. You rearranged your schedule for this, and Brighton is going to be late for his baseball game now. I truly am sorry."

Brighton shrugged it off. He moved to put his Gameboy away, and Grace started to gather up her crayons, when CC held up a hand.

"Oh, no. No, no, no. Keep playing, kids. This just won't do."

"Miss Babcock, it's over," Niles said.

"No it's not," she stood up and jutted out her chin stubbornly. "It ain't over til the fat lady sings. So start doing some vocal warm-ups, Niles, because god dammit, you are going to sing!"

She slid by the boy and then gracelessly climbed over Niles' legs. He grabbed her hand to stop her.

"Miss Babcock, whatever you're about to do, you do not have to do it."

For a moment their interlocked hands transfixed her, but then she looked up and met Niles' eyes. A not unpleasant chill went down her spine. She gave his hand a quick, little squeeze and smiled determinedly at him. "Niles, they don't call me 'The Bitch of Broadway' for nothing. I will handle this. Besides, only I'm allowed to make you look this miserable!"

She extracted her hand from his and marched down to the front of the auditorium, where Martin sat reading an unauthorized biography of Judy Garland. She stood in front of him, leaning back against the stage and crossing her arms. "Excuse me? Milton?" she asked, clearing her throat.

"It's Martin," he muttered as he turned the page of his book.

"Right, of course. I'm so sorry," CC said sweetly, laying it on thick. "Listen, I wanted to talk to you about myâ€|myâ€|um, my friend. He came here to audition today, and we rearranged our schedules for the whole day to make this happen. So I would appreciate it if you let him sing for you."

"No can do, lady," Martin said, not even looking up from the book.

She nodded. "I figured you would say something like that. That's why I hope you don't mind when I do this," she snatched the book from his hands, and dropped it into the orchestra pit.

"Ouch! Paper cut!" Martin yelped, his thumb immediately going to his mouth.

CC leaned down in front of him, a hand on either side of him on the armrests. She gave him her best menacing glare, and he audibly

gulped.

"Listen here, buster. You don't know the day I've had. I've already put one man in the hospital today; please don't make me have to do it again."

"Okay, okay! He can audition!" Martin surrendered.

CC stared him down for one more beat, then, satisfied she had gotten her way, stepped back, brushing her hands off on her dress. "Thank you, Marvin. I'd offer you cash but I am without my purse for the day. How would you like two tickets to opening night of The Sound of Music?"

"Fine, fine. That's fine! Let's just get this over with," Martin said as he pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and delicately dabbed at his temple, yelling for the pianist to come back out to play the audition piece.

"Great. I can't thank you enough for being such a good sport about all this," she said, unable to keep the sarcasm out of her voice. She looked up and waved to Niles. "Niles? Could you come down here, please?"

Niles looked like he would rather the floor open up and swallow him whole, but he reluctantly nodded and got up, dragging his feet like he was on his way to the electric chair. Brighton and Grace followed, taking a seat behind CC and Martin.

"Now remember, I said he could audition. I didn't say I was definitely going to let him in," Martin whispered to CC.

CC merely shot him a withering glare then smiled when he cowered back in his seat.

Niles paused to look at CC uncertainly. She reached up and patted him on the back reassuringly, then pushed him forward. He sighed and climbed up on stage, walked over to the piano, and whispered something to the pianist. The pianist nodded and pulled out sheet music, and CC was relieved to see he had the music needed for the song. Niles walked over to the microphone and cleared his throat. "Hello, I'm Niles, and I will be singing The Impossible Dream."

CC braced herself as the music started, balling her hands up and resting them under her chin. He seemed so nervous. She hoped she hadn't made a mistake.

But when Niles opened his mouth and began singing, all the insecurities melted away, and CC was mesmerized. She had known he had a nice voice, but she never could have predicted just how beautiful it truly was. Her legs suddenly felt weak and she sank back in the chair next to Martin's, her hands still clasped together by her face.

He hit the final note perfectly, and everyone was absolutely silent for a split second in awe of the performance, when suddenly the room erupted in thunderous applause. CC looked around confusedly, realizing that people had wandered in to listen to the song.

Niles jumped down from the stage and looked at CC and Martin eagerly.

"Well? How'd I do?"

CC unclasped her hands and looked at Martin, who was bawling like a baby. "Yes, Morton, how'd he do?"

Martin wiped his tears away and blew his nose loudly into his handkerchief. "That was one of the most beautiful auditions I've ever heard. You're in!"

Brighton and Grace cheered while Niles pumped a fist into the air. CC beamed up at him, genuinely happy for him.

"Practice starts next Tuesday at 3pm." Martin shook his head, trying to will the emotions away. "If you'll excuse me, I need a drink." He flounced away, his cape swirling behind him.

CC and Niles stared at him leaving then turned to each other, shaking their heads simultaneously in amusement.

"Well congratulations, Niles," CC said with a slow clap. "You've truly made it. You've gone from simply being a housemaid to simply being a choirboy in a group of singing housemaids. Another classic rags-to-rags story for the books."

Niles simply laughed, his eyes twinkling in delight. "That was a good one."

"Thanks," she said, eyeing him curiously. She found she liked this side of Niles. She was being herself, and this normally provided him with plenty of material to insult her with. He was still teasing her, but in a playful way rather than his usual disapproving way. He was looking at her fondly, instead of in annoyance. He seemed to genuinely get a kick out of her. And she was genuinely getting a kick out of him. She expected this revelation to unnerve her, but it only made her more curious. She wondered what else she could do to make his eyes twinkle.

"I'm the one who should be thanking you," he said, sitting down next to her and squeezing her arm. "I can't thank you enough, Miss Babcock. Thank you for doing that for me. I'll never forget it."

CC looked down at her arm where his hand was and swallowed, her mouth suddenly feeling very dry. "It was nothing, Niles. Plus \_I told you\_: it ain't over til the fat lady sings."

Niles shook his head, a playful smile gracing his features as he let go of her arm. "Then what song shall you be singing, Miss Babcock?"

She laughed airily, tossing her head back, before collecting herself. "I'd sing that one song from Chicago."

"All that Jazz?" he asked.

"No, not that one. Cell Block Tango."

"Hmm, I don't think I know it." Niles said.

"Oh you'd just \_love\_ it!" She smiled like the cat that ate the canary. "It's a song all the women prisoners sing. They describe, in

explicit detail, how they murdered the useless men in their lives."

Niles mock-bowed in his seat to her. "TouchÃ©."

"Thank you."

"We better get a move on, if you want to make your interview on time," he turned around to the children. "Master Brighton, why don't you change into your baseball uniform in the restrooms here so you're ready to go once Miss Babcock's interview is over?"

At the mention of baseball, Brighton deflated like a popped balloon. "Yeah, okay."

CC, Niles, and Grace watched as he grabbed his backpack and dragged his feet back to the restrooms.

"This is all my fault," CC groaned, resting her elbow on the back of her chair and putting her face in her hand. "I got him all excited to stand up to the bully and now he might not even get to play."

"Hey," Niles said, tilting her chin up to look at him. "He'll get over it. Besides, this interview is sort of really important now that you've sent that set designer to the hospital twice. Brighton wants his father's business to be successful so he one day has an inheritance."

"You're right," she nodded, and he removed his hand from her face. "I know you're right. But god, I just had to send the set designer to the hospital today of all days!"

"For a second time," he reminded her.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Not helping."

"Sorry," Niles said, not sounding sorry at all.

"Sure you are," CC said knowingly.

The door opened, and Brighton walked in, wearing a light blue jersey and baseball cap with white baseball pants. "I'm ready."

The other three got up and walked out together, heading for the car. Everyone was quiet, which left CC feeling unsettled. She looked at Brighton, who had his head down.

"Brighton, I just wanted to say again how sorry I am about all this. I wish I could cancel. I wish I didn't send the guy to the hospital today."

"You know," Niles cut in. "I can't help but feel like you don't regret sending him to the hospital, just the fact that you did it today."

CC looked up at him, genuinely confused. "Yeah, so? If you heard the comments he made to me before I hit him that first time, you wouldn't blame me."

"That guy was a real jerk, Niles," Grace said.

"I stand corrected," Niles said.

"Yeah, I'm glad Miss Babcock did what she did. It sounds like he was really making the scenery suck, and I want the show to be a success," Brighton said, perking up. "I have my inheritance to think about, after all!"

CC and Niles' eyes met, and they exchanged relieved smiles. Niles shot her a knowing wink. "Told you."

## 7. Chapter 7

**\*\*One of the shorter chapters, but I think the last 3 are on the longer side, so...enjoy!\*\***

\* \* \*

<p><strong>Chapter 7:<strong>

"Now, are you sure you know what exactly you're going to say in the interview?" Niles asked from the bench outside the café. CC was meeting the journalist at. Brighton and Grace were on either side of him, Grace reading a chapter book and Brighton tossing his baseball in the air.

"Niles, this is not my first rodeo," CC said pacing, too distracted to realize she'd just set the butler up perfectly.

"Well, \_I\_ know that," Niles said. "Everyone knows your Mr. Sheffield's prized stallion."

She stopped for a moment to glare at him and then continued pacing. "I just need to spin this so that I'm not a complete monster."

Brighton looked up at the butler. "You gonna let that one go?"

"Too easy," Niles shook his head and waved him off. "Besides, she's in work mode. She's not really listening â€" she's too 'in the zone' right now. And it's only fun if she hears what I say."

"Okay, I'm ready," CC glanced in her reflection in the window of their parked car. "God, thankfully there's no photographs for this interview. I can't even touch up my lipstick."

She spun around, trying to get a look at her backside. "Did I get all the flour off me?"

"Your dress is white," Niles pointed out, though that didn't stop him from a cursory glance at her bottom. "So, yes, you got all the flour."

"Good. Okay, here I go." She nodded determinedly, smoothing out her dress. She turned and marched towards the café, her heels clicking on the pavement confidently.

"Knock 'em dead," Niles called. "Wait, no, don't do that. You've already done that today. Justâ€¦good luck!"

CC paused, shaking her head, and Niles knew she was rolling her eyes at him. She took a deep breath and entered the caf  .

"Think she'll be okay?" Brighton asked.

"She can handle herself," Niles said with a nod. "Though if the interviewer pisses her off, I hope there are no pieces of plywood nearby to hit her over the head."

"Or anything nearby to push her into," Grace added, not looking up from her book.

Brighton and Niles looked at the giant, plate glass window in the front of the caf   and exchanged worried glances.

Niles shook his head. "Oh what am I saying? She'll be fine! Come on, let's toss that baseball around so you're ready when we get to the game."

The two boys got up and spread out on the sidewalk, giving the window one more worried glance before they started playing catch.

\* \* \*

><p>CC scanned the caf   and spotted the famous Broadway journalist, Melanie Parker, sitting in a quiet corner next to the front window. She smiled and made her way over to the table.<p>

"Melanie, hello," she greeted warmly.

Melanie stood up, smoothing out her tan blazer and matching skirt, her dirty blonde hair reflecting in the light from the window. She smiled and held out a hand, and CC shook it. "Hello, CC, it's been a while."

"It has," CC agreed as they took their seats. A waitress came to the table to take their order.

"I'll have a cappuccino," Melanie said.

CC would have done just about anything for a jolt of caffeine, but Niles still had the leftover change from lunch in case of an emergency. She didn't want to stick Melanie with the bill; she was already going to look bad enough as it was. "Just a water, thanks," she said with a forced smile that came off more as a grimace.

The waitress left and the two women sat in silence, as Melanie usually waited til their orders arrived before starting the interview. CC drummed her fingers impatiently on the table and looked around. A flash of blue caught her eye, and she looked out the window, spotting Niles chasing after a baseball. Brighton chased after Niles while Grace watched from the bench, their hysterical laughter reaching CC even through the plate glass window. A smile tugged at her lips.

The waitress brought their drinks. Melanie took a quick sip of her cappuccino, and dove right in. "So, CC, tell me about Jack Taylor."

CC reluctantly turned away from the window and looked at the woman bemusedly. "Who?"

"Jack Taylor," Melanie repeated.

CC stared at the journalist blankly, wracking her brain trying to figure out who Jack Taylor was. "I'm sorry, am I supposed to know who he is? The name doesn't ring a bell."

Melanie looked at CC incredulously. "He's the set designer you sent to the hospital. Twice actually, if the rumors from today are true."

CC was not a praying woman, but in that moment she prayed that she would spontaneously combust. She closed her eyes and rubbed the bridge of her nose, knowing there was nothing she could say to fix the situation. She'd always just known him as the set designer! "Right, sorry. It's been a long day."

Melanie nodded, jotting something down on her legal pad. "It sounds like it, considering what a disarray the theatre was in when I stopped by. Is it true you took the day off? So close to opening night?"

"Well, I was there this morning, but after the events that transpired, I decided I needed to get away til Monday. Have a nice, long weekend, you know?"

"Yes," Melanie nodded. "Why don't you tell me about the events that transpired this morning, CC? Actually, why don't we start with the first event, the one that led to Mr. Taylor making a statement to Playbill that you're the Bitch of Broadway?"

"Okay," CC said, taking a long sip of her water to buy her some time. "We had a disagreement over the way the scenery was looking for Sheffield Production's next play: The Sound of Music. Mr. Taylor said some very inappropriate, disgusting, disrespectful remarks to me, and Iâ€¦well, I hit him over the head with a piece of plywood."

"I see," Melanie frowned. "Mr. Taylor led Playbill to believe your actions were seemingly out of nowhere and that he was completely innocent."

"He said WHAT?! That's a load of bull-" CC started passionately, before collecting herself and taking a small sip of water. "I meanâ€¦what I meant to say was, that is entirely untrue."

"I'm glad to hear that. I didn't think you were the violent lunatic he was trying to paint you out to be," Melanie said sweetly, and CC would have been relieved if she didn't know the woman's penchant for luring her interviewees into a false sense of security. Melanie took another sip of her drink and proved CC correct. "But thenâ€¦the same thing happened today, so it seems like there is a pattern with you, doesn't it, CC?"

Another flash of blue caught CC's eye, and she looked outside. Niles ran back with the baseball, and Brighton and Grace were trying to tackle him to the ground. He gave in, dropped the ball, grabbed both children, and began tickling them. Their squeals of laughter were infectious, and CC couldn't help but laugh softly.

"CC?" Melanie asked.

CC tore her eyes away from the window and looked at the woman regretfully. "I'm sorry, I can't do this. I have to go."

"What?" Melanie cried in disbelief. "CC, this interview is supposed to go out in two days! My deadline is tonight!"

"I know, I know. Write whatever you want. Paint me as a monster, I don't care," CC shrugged nonchalantly. "The truth of the matter is Jack Taylor is a misogynistic asshole who got what he deserved. I don't have time to defend myself for that. I am babysitting two children today â€" they're outside right now. See them? The little girl was with me this morning, and Mr. Taylor tried to strike her when we disagreed over his hideous designs. That's why I punched him. And now, because I'm in here trying to make myself look better - for something I'm actually quite proud of doing, mind you - that little boy out there is going to be late for his baseball game. And I'm his good luck charm. So I'm leaving now so he can make the game on time and I can cheer him on. Thank you."

Melanie's jaw dropped, and she merely stared at CC completely dumbfounded as CC slid her chair back and got up. "Sorry, Mel. You're a good writer. You've got this. I'm sure you'll be able to put something together for Playbill." She strode out of the cafÃ©, wishing she had sunglasses to slide on for such a badass moment.

\* \* \*

><p>Niles and the kids were still laughing on the ground when they heard the familiar clicking of heels on the pavement, and then a shadow loomed over them. All three of them looked up at the same time to find CC leaning against the car.<p>

"Let's go! We have a baseball game to make," she said with a smug smile.

"Yes!" Brighton cheered, shooting up off the ground and hugging CC. She looked startled for a moment, but then she relaxed and pulled the hat off his head, ruffling his hair.

"Did you beat up the interview lady?" Grace asked, still in Niles lap. He burst into laughter at the question and tickled Grace again.

"No!" CC said, teasingly indignant.

Niles and Grace stood up. He unlocked the car, let the children in the back seat, and shut the door. "What did you do?"

"Nothing. I told the truth," CC said with a shrug.

"You blew the interview so that Brighton could attend his baseball game on time?" he asked.

"Well, yeah, that's one reason," she nodded. "And I was tired of acting like I needed to feel ashamed for what I did. That guy said some truly disgusting things about me. That's why I hit him the first time. And then today I was protecting Grace, so of course I don't



regret what I did."

"What did he say?" he asked, a hint of anger in his eyes.

"Justâ€¦I don't know," she blushed. "Stuff about just how exactly I worked my way to the top, if you know what I mean."

"In that case, maybe later on I will pay him a visit," he said.

"Why?" she rolled her eyes, already guessing the punch line. "So you can salute him for getting some good insults in on me?"

"No," Niles shook his head, the anger now evident all over his face, and he gave her a heated look. "So I can hit him over the head with an even bigger piece of plywood."

Whatever CC had expected Niles to say, that wasn't it. "Oh," she said quietly.

"No one insults CC Babcock but me," he said passionately. "And I'm sorry I teased you all day for hitting him twice."

"It's okay," she said a little breathlessly, and she had a sudden desire to fan herself off. Niles was never protective of her. She didn't hate it.

They stared at each other for a while, until CC shook herself out of it. "Um, the game! We should get going."

Niles' eyes widened. "The game! Of course, you're right. Let's go!"

He jogged around to the driver's side and she opened her door and slid into the passenger seat. He started the car and pulled out into traffic, and they discussed baseball strategies with Brighton, CC stealing curious glances at Niles the whole drive to the baseball field.

## 8. Chapter 8

**\*\*Author's Note: Thanks for sticking with this! We're almost done!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 8:<strong>

Miraculously, they somehow managed to arrive at the baseball game early. Niles bought everyone water bottles at the snack bar, and they all wished Brighton luck before he ran off to warm up with his team.

"Brighton, remember what I told you!" CC called to him.

He turned around and gave her a knowing thumbs-up before hurrying off to meet up with his team.

"You realize you're going to have to attend every baseball game of

his from now on, don't you?" Niles asked as they headed toward the bleachers.

"Nanny Fine will just \_love\_ that," CC said sarcastically. "Huh, maybe I won't mind going to all Brighton's baseball games after all!"

Niles shook his head in amusement, and they climbed the bleachers until they found a free spot. Grace sat down between the two adults and pulled out a book to read. CC noticed how thick the book was â€" not typical for a 6-year-old's tastes â€" and she looked at the title: Charlotte's Web.

"Grace, you're reading chapter books already?" she asked.

"Yes," the girl nodded. "I find picture books too juvenile."

She went back to reading, totally engrossed in her book, and CC looked up at Niles, her eyes wide with surprise. "I'm impressed."

"Miss Grace has always been wise beyond her years," Niles said fondly.

"I just hope she doesn't get to the end of that book while we're watching her. I think I cried myself to sleep the first time I read it," CC said.

"It is a sad one. I hope she saves the ending for Mr. Sheffield and Miss Fine to deal with," Niles agreed. He then looked at CC curiously.

"What?" she asked, tucking a stray hair behind her ear self-consciously.

"I'm getting all sorts of insight into what you were like as a child today. You didn't enjoy the crusts on your peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. You've always been able to negotiate things to get your way â€" starting with convincing your nanny to give you an extra dessert with lunch when you were little. And now you cried over the ending of Charlotte's Web," he ticked off the facts one by one.

"I'm shattering your image of me, aren't I?" CC grinned sheepishly. "Next, you'll be doing a tell-all interview with Melanie Parker. I can see it now: \_CC Babcock: Not Really the Bitch of Broadway\_."

"Your secret is safe with me," Niles grinned.

She returned the smile and took a swig of her water, watching as Brighton and his teammates took practice swings.

"Miss Babcock?" Niles said suddenly. She turned to look at him, surprised that he looked almost shy. "What were you and the children talking about in the auditorium this afternoon? I couldn't help but noticeâ€"you looked upset."

CC froze for a moment. Normally she would've shut down at the thought of sharing anything personal with the butler, saying something sarcastic or cruel instead, but they had been getting along so well

all day. And he was there when Sara died; he knew what they all went through.

"Oh, um," she said, exhaling slowly and picking at a thread on the hem of her dress. "They were asking about Sara."

"And you talked to them about her?" Niles asked.

"Well, not really about Sara, more so about what happened after she died. Actually, we were talking about how much you've influenced Brighton over the years," she looked up at him and raised an eyebrow.

"Oh?" Niles asked, feigning innocence.

"\_Oh\_, don't even," CC said. "You know damn well how much that boy takes after you! The sarcasm, the pranks, the insults! That's \_all\_ you, Amelia Bedelia!"

"Yes, I can't imagine who else he could have possibly learned how to insult from," Niles said sarcastically, pretending to seriously think it over as he stroked his chin.

CC laughed. "Hey, I didn't spend nearly as much time around the kids as you did."

Niles nodded in agreement. "You were busy keeping the business afloat in the absence of Mr. Sheffield."

She was unprepared for the sudden serious turn the conversation took. "Um, yeah, I guess so."

"It's because of you that Sheffield Productions even exists today. You know that, right?"

She did, but no one ever acknowledged it. "It's nice to hear," she admitted with a small nod. "Brighton actually even remembers me helping out with him and his sisters sometimes. I didn't think anyone remembered that."

"I remember. You were good with them," he paused as if debating with himself over whether or not to continue. He sighed, giving in. "And truth be told, I don't think I could have done it by myself."

She didn't know how to respond to that, so she simply smiled. He smiled back, and they turned their attention back to the teams warming up.

"You said I looked upset at the auditorium," CC said abruptly as the thought occurred to her. "I wasn't. The kids asked if one of these days we could sit down and I could tell them about Sara, since we were, you know, sort of friends and went to college together, and all thatâ€"

"She meant a lot to you," Niles cut in, knowing she was trying to downplay her feelings.

"Yeah," CC said, her voice barely above a whisper. "She did. So I told them we could talk about her one of these days."

"That's very kind of you, Miss Babcock," Niles said with a warm smile. "I think it will mean a lot to them."

CC nodded, unsure of what to say, and looked away, finding the advertisements on the fence on the field suddenly absolutely fascinating.

"CC?" Niles said gently. He'd never used her first name before. Her neck immediately snapped up, her eyes met his, and she was surprised by how tenderly he was looking at her. "I think it will mean a lot to you, too."

CC's eyes filled with tears and she nodded, not trusting her voice. Niles reached around Grace, still captivated by her book, and he placed a hand on her upper arm, tracing little circles. CC placed her other hand over his, and they sat quietly for a few comforting moments.

Once CC was sure she wouldn't start openly weeping, she let go of Niles' hand, wiped away a few stray tears, from her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths. "Today is a weird day," she declared.

"I agree," Niles said. He gave her arm a squeeze and let go. "It's been weird, and frustrating, and chaotic, but we're having fun, right? And we're going to keep having fun. We're going to have a happy rest-of-the-day! No more tears!"

"Hear, hear!" CC mock-cheered.

As if on cue, Grace closed her book and looked up at Niles and CC. "Niles? Miss Babcock?" she sniffled. "Charlotte doesn't seem to be doing very well. I think she's gonna die."

The adults exchanged defeated looks, and CC wrapped a comforting arm around the crying girl, while Niles put the dreaded book away.

\* \* \*

><p>Grace eventually calmed down, and the game started. It was going well enough. The score had managed to stay tied until the top of the ninth inning, when the other team got ahead by one point.<p>

It was the bottom of the ninth with two outs and someone on first, and it was, of course, Brighton's turn up to bat.

"This is too much pressure," Niles whispered.

"He can do it," CC said.

"You guys are hurting me," Grace said with a yelp. Niles and CC looked down and realized they were each gripping one of Grace's hands.

"Sorry," they mumbled at the same time as they each let go.

Brighton took a few practice swings and stepped up to the plate. They watched as the pitcher motioned for everyone to move in closer.

"Oh, come on! That's not fair!" Niles said, gesturing angrily to the field.

"What a punk," CC muttered.

Brighton swung and missed. Strike One.

Because she couldn't help herself, CC stood up and cheered, "C'mon, Brighton! Aim for his head!"

Niles joined her, standing and clapping. "Kick his sodding arse!"

The appalled crowd gasped and turned to look at them.

"What?" they asked at the same time, their faces scrunching up in bewilderment.

Grace yanked on their hands, pulling them back down to their seats. "You'll have to excuse my parents. It's their first baseball game," she explained.

The crowd murmured and nodded in understanding, turning their attention back to the game.

"Parents?" Niles and CC exclaimed at the same time.

"It would've taken too long to explain that you're my daddy's butler and business partner babysitting me because we got locked out of the house," Grace said.

Brighton swung and missed again. Strike Two.

"Oh, god, I don't know if I can look," CC said uneasily, covering her eyes with her hand.

"You HAVE to look! You're his good luck charm, remember?" Niles reminded her, reaching past Grace once again and pulling her hand down from her face. He didn't let go; instead he gripped it tightly, clearly nervous for Brighton.

CC didn't say anything about it, squeezing his hand back due to nerves.

"Look! The pitcher is saying something to him," Grace pointed to the field where sure enough, the older boy was clearly teasing Brighton.

"How is the umpire just letting this happen?" Niles asked in an outrage.

"Don't worry," CC said, waving it off with her unoccupied hand. "The boy's got this one."

Sure enough, they watched as Brighton said something right back to the pitcher, the smirk on his face clearly suggesting it was a taunting remark. The pitcher balked at the comment and looked around sputtering for a few moments. Brighton visibly relaxed, looking confident and ready at bat. The pitcher tried to shake off whatever it was the boy said to him, and tossed him an easy one. Brighton swung and sent the ball flying over the fence. The crowd went wild.

"HOME RUN!" Grace, Niles, and CC exclaimed at the same time, jumping up and cheering. Niles picked Grace up so she could see past the standing crowd, and before CC knew what was happening she had her arms wrapped around the two of them. Niles shifted Grace to his other side and placed an arm around CC's waist.

"He did it; he actually did it! Babcock, maybe you really are a good luck charm!"

"I guess I am," CC said with a smile.

They watched as the crowd cheered for Brighton. The team picked him up, parading him around in victory.

"You must be so proud of your son," a woman passing by said to them.

"We are," Niles and CC said at the same time, both their voices filled with unabashed pride.

They stood like that for a few more moments, wrapped in each other's arms, before they registered what they were doing. They broke apart and avoided eye contact.

Niles cleared his throat and motioned toward the field. "Uh, we should get down there and find Brighton."

"Right. Yeah," CC said.

Niles put Grace down and they moved down the bleachers and walked toward the benches, where Brighton was basking in glow of his win. He spotted Niles, CC, and Grace and immediately abandoned the team celebration to run over to them. He launched himself into CC's arms. CC was no longer taken aback by such an action, and she squeezed him back.

"I did it, guys! Did you see?! I won the game!"

"Did we see? Of course we saw! You were awesome!" CC said, pulling back from their hug and returning to a standing position.

Niles ruffled the boy's hair. "Well done, Brighton."

Grace gave her brother a high five. "Good job, B!"

"It's thanks to Miss Babcock's advice. I couldn't have done it without you," Brighton said sincerely, beaming up at the woman.

"Oh, it was nothing," CC said waving him off. "Did you use the line on the pitcher that I gave you?"

"What line?" Niles asked.

"That's not what your mom said last night," Brighton and CC said at the same time, CC no longer afraid the butler would scold her for corrupting the children.

"Nice," Niles said with a grin.

"I did use it," Brighton said.

"Oh that's fantastic! I'm so happy!" CC said, genuinely pleased. "What did he say to get you to say it?"

"He said I didn't have a chance in hell of scoring."

Niles and CC paused to consider the remark for a few moments.

"You know, that couldn't have worked out more perfect if I'd planned it. I'm impressed," CC said.

"Not even our insults work out that well," Niles agreed.

Again they paused to think about the ingenuity of the insult until Grace broke the silence. "We have to get to the party!"

Niles' eyes widened. "That's right; we do! But wait, do you have her gift, Miss Grace?" Grace nodded and opened her backpack revealing a wrapped birthday present. Niles sighed in relief as the children skipped ahead to the car. He turned to CC uneasily. "Miss Babcock, I hate to drag you along for this as well. Do any of your neighbors perhaps have a spare key to your apartment?"

"Niles, I couldn't even tell you who my neighbors are," CC said with an eye roll, and he laughed fondly at that. "It's fine. We've already spent this much of the day together; may as well go to a kid's birthday party together, too. How bad could it be?"

"It's at Chuck E. Cheese's," Niles said. CC looked at him blankly. "Right. I don't know why I expected you to know what that is. It's an arcade."

"That doesn't soundâ€¦ \_completely\_ awful," CC said with a shrug.

"There's a show with a bunch of animatronic singing animals, the lead of which is a giant mouse."

"Fantastic," CC deadpanned.

"But at least we'll get a meal out of it," Niles said, smiling as CC's mood seemed to brighten. "Granted, it'll most likely be cheaply made pizza, but at least we don't have to pay for it."

CC wrinkled her nose, but then something occurred to her and she smiled mischievously. "So this place is an arcade, huh?"

"Yes."

"Do they have air hockey?"

"I'm sure they do, why?"

"I was just thinking, after all the crap we've had to eat today, how about a game of air hockey? Loser has to buy the winner a gourmet dinner." She shot him a challenging look and turned around to follow the children to the car.

"It's a date," Niles called after her, the words tumbling out of him

much too quickly before he could stop himself. CC's head whipped around, her eyes wide with shock. "I, uh, I meanâ€¦ what I meant wasâ€¦" he trailed off, knowing any backtracking would be a lost cause.

"It's a date," she repeated softly with a small smile, her cheeks flushing attractively. She continued to back up into the parking lot, Niles following after her, a sudden spring in his step.

"I can't believe I'm saying this, Niles, but this day hasn't been completely terrible," CC said.

"I can't believe you're admitting that either-MISS BABCOCK! WATCH OUT!" Niles yelled suddenly as a car turned a corner and headed straight for CC.

CC turned around and managed to get out of the way, but the speeding car hit a giant puddle, sending a tsunami of mud all over her and her impeccably white dress.

She stood frozen in place, and Niles hurried to her side, afraid she had been hurt. "Miss Babcock?"

She turned to look at him, wiping mud from her face. "What?"

"Are you injured?"

"Just my pride."

"Well that's certainly a shame; you had such little pride left to begin with," he teased. "Look at it this way: at least you still look better than the animatronic singing mouse!"

"Niles, you sweet talker, you," CC rolled her eyes good-naturedly as she flicked her hands. The mud landed in little \_plops\_ on the ground

"Beware of the Blob! It creeps, and leaps, and glides and slides across the floor!" Niles recited dramatically.

CC pursed her lips trying to fight back laughter. "I truly hate you."

"What if I told you I have a gym bag in the trunk of my car with spare clothes in it?"

She smiled gratefully. "I don't hate you anymore."

"That's the spirit! I'd pat you on the back, butâ€¦"

"Beware the blob, I know, I know," she nodded.

They leisurely strode back to the car in silence for a few moments, when CC spoke up.

"So, I totally spoke too soon when I said I wasn't having a terrible time today, didn't I?"

"You sure did, Babs. You sure did."



## 9. Chapter 9

**\*\*Author's Note: One chapter left! Look for it sometime tomorrow. Thanks again, everyone!\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 9<strong>:

"Gee, Niles, I don't know what my favorite part of the day has been so far," CC called. "Was it when an entire set of my show got destroyed? Was it when I passed out in the doctor's office? Was it when I blew the interview that was supposed to save my career? Or is it now, as I change out of my muddy dress â€" \_one of my favorite dresses, mind you\_ - and into your dirty gym sweatpants in a goddamn porta-potty?!"

"Well, it's tough to say," Niles said from the other side of the door, pretending to seriously consider her choices. She could hear Brighton and Grace giggling at him. "When you fainted, you could have sustained a concussion. But in the porta-potty you might contract some infectious disease. And those are clean sweatpants, by the way!"

"Well thank god for small favors," CC said as she stepped out of the porta-potty, throwing her muddy dress into Niles' gym bag and tossing the bag to him. The dark gray sweatpants were baggy, but comfortable, and she'd rolled them at the waist a few times so she wouldn't trip over them in her heels. The t-shirt was a plain, navy blue one, and it smelled like him. She'd never admit it, but she loved that. "I look ridiculous."

"I think keeping the pearl earrings and necklace on was a nice touch," Niles said with an approving nod. "You look like a socialite coming home the morning after a wild night out."

CC clapped her hands and bounced up and down in her heels sarcastically. "Oh, perfect! Just the look I was going for! Setting a great example for all the little girls that will be at this party."

Niles waved his hand nonchalantly. "The children at this party are probably used to it considering who their parents are. This is Caroline Blake's daughter's birthday party."

CC felt the blood drain from her face. "Caroline Blake? The heiress to the Blake fortune? \_The\_ Caroline Blake who invested in Sheffield Production's upcoming show: The Sound of Music? You mean \_that\_ Caroline Blake?!"

"Yes, \_that\_ Caroline Blake. Her daughter Meredith is in Miss Grace's class," Niles said as he ushered the children over to the car. He let them in, and then he walked back to CC. "Take a deep breath, Miss Babcock. You look like you're about to faint again, and I don't relish a trip to the emergency room after the day we've had."

"Niles, I can't go to a Caroline Blake party looking like this! Who knows what other women from that social circle will be there!" CC

said in a panicky voice.

"I don't see what choice you have, Miss Babcock," Niles said, looking down at his watch. "We're already running a bit late."

"Butâ€", " CC started, but Niles grabbed her hand and pulled her to the car. She dragged her heels reluctantly.

"Miss Babcock," Niles said once they got to the car, placing his hands on her shoulders and looking deep into her eyes. "Trust me. Wait until you see this place. No one is going to notice you when there is a giant robotic mouse singing on stage."

"Niles," CC sighed. "You don't know these women. They're catty and judgmental."

"So what?" Niles shrugged. "Just stick with me."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

Niles nodded. "Do you think any of the woman you just described are going to want to hang out with Maxwell Sheffield's butler? Plus, you provide better conversation than Brighton."

He let go of her shoulders and went around to his side of the car. CC stared at him curiously.

"Plus, I do believe we have a competitive game of air hockey awaiting us, don't we?" Niles said with a wink.

"Oh, you're on, Drano Gretsky!" she said with a smile, the worries of running into Manhattan's snobbiest fading away.

\* \* \*

><p>"<em>This<em> is where Caroline Blake is holding her daughter's birthday party?" CC asked incredulously as she took in the sight before her: noisy games, noisy music, and noisy children, all running amuck, their sticky fingers leaving handprints on anything they touched.

"Miss Babcock, this place is the coolest! Everyone wants to have their birthday parties here, even rich snobs," Brighton explained.

"I told you, you and your sweatpants fit right in," Niles said, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the garish décor.

"Can't we leave the kids here and go do something else?" CC asked, loud enough for only the butler to hear

"Would you trust this place to supervise the children?" Niles responded, leaning towards her, his breath tickling her ear.

"Fine," CC sighed. "You're right. Let's just get this over with."

The four of them made their way over to the tables where the party for Meredith Blake was set up. Grace and Brighton immediately picked up cups of tokens and headed off to play the arcade games. Niles took

the present from Grace's bag, and he and CC went over to the gift table.

"CC Babcock? Is that you, dear?" Caroline Blake called in disbelief.

"Crap," CC muttered under her breath before turning and facing the woman, a huge, fake smile plastered to her face. "Yes, Caroline, darling, hello!"

"What on earth are you doing here?" Caroline asked as she looked CC up and down, unable to hide the judgment from her voice.

"It's a long story. The short of it is that I'm babysitting Maxwell's children today with Niles, their butler," CC motioned to Niles, who waved politely.

"I see," Caroline said derisively, smoothing out the nonexistent wrinkles on her pale pink Chanel suit. "Well, help yourselves to anything." With a haughty sniff, Caroline turned on her matching designer pumps and went off to find more socially acceptable people to socialize with.

"Well, that went well," CC quipped. "On the bright side, she didn't ask about the show. I don't know if I'd have had the energy to pretend everything is coming along swimmingly. I'm sure she's heard the rumors." She paused for a moment, considering. "Though I suppose they're not really rumors if they're true. Oh well, she'll see it in Melanie's article in a few days."

"Come on," Niles said, grabbing her hand and leading her over to the table where the food was set up, wanting to get her mind off her worries. "Let's just forget about her and have some pizza."

They grabbed their slices and picked a table close enough to the arcade that they could keep an eye on the kids, but far enough away that the noise wasn't overbearing. They ate their pizza and watched in amusement as Brighton played the Whack-A-Mole game, hitting the moles so passionately he missed nearly every time. Grace stuck with a racecar game, biting her lip as she concentrated more on driving safely than actually winning the game.

CC spotted the air hockey table first. "There it is, Niles. You ready to have your butt whipped?"

"I didn't know you were into that sort of thing, Miss Babcock. Though I suppose I should have suspected as much."

"You ain't seen nothing yet."

Niles grabbed their plates and tossed them into a nearby trashcan. "Now, all we have left is the change from lunch and the water bottles at the baseball game. Is it fiscally responsible for us to spend some of it on tokens for arcade games?"

"Niles," CC gasped, placing a hand on her chest dramatically. "A gourmet dinner is at stake here! We'd be remiss if we didn't spend the money on tokens!"

"You're right," Niles nodded solemnly. "You're absolutely

right."

They strode side by side to get tokens. Niles pulled out a five-dollar bill and placed it in the machine, grabbing an empty cup and collecting their coins.

"After you, m'lady," Niles said with a slight bow as they got to the arcade entrance.

CC batted her eyelashes at him and entered the arcade, making a beeline for the air hockey table. She was undeterred when she saw two little girls already playing the game. "Okay, game over. You two need to scram."

The children looked at each other confusedly before glancing up at CC nervously.

"You heard me! Beat it!" she motioned for them to move out of her way. "Niles, give them some tokens to show our gratitude."

This seemed to appease the girls, and they grinned excitedly.

Niles smiled apologetically at the girls, throwing a generous amount of tokens in each of their cups. "Thank you," he called after them as they scampered off. "You really have a way with children, Miss Babcock."

"Thank you," she said dismissively as she popped the tokens into the air hockey table.

"Would now be a bad time to tell you one of those girls was Meredith Blake?" Niles asked uneasily.

"What?" CC gasped, looking shocked for a brief moment before shaking it off. "Oh well. Her mother already thinks I'm insane anyway. Now get over here so I can kick your ass."

Niles took his spot at the other end of the table. "Yes, sir."

\* \* \*

><p>"HA! I did it! Victory is mine!" CC cheered in triumph as the game lit up and played music indicating it was over and that she had won 10-7. "You owe me dinner, Dirt Devil!"<p>

"You're right. That I do, Miss Babcock," Niles smiled good-naturedly.

"Wait a minute," CC shook her head. "Why don't you seem more upset that I just kicked your ass?"

"Because I'm not a sore loser?" Niles supplied as he grabbed the tickets she had won and handed them to her.

"I've seen you throw a tantrum when Maxwell beats you at chess," CC shot him an accusatory look.

"Mr. Sheffield has NEVER beat me at chess and you know it!" Niles exclaimed defensively.

"Okay, you got me there," CC conceded. "Like Maxwell could ever beat anyone at a game of logic. Hell, like Maxwell could ever beat anyone at a game of Candy Land, come to think of it. But did you let me win, Niles?"

Niles opened his mouth to argue, when a voice on the loudspeaker announced that those there for the Meredith Blake party were to head to their table to sing to the birthday girl. "Oh, would you look at that! It's cake time!"

"Niles!" CC yelled in frustration.

"Miss Babcock," Niles said, his eyes wide with innocence. "We can't miss the cake! Come on!"

She begrudgingly followed him to a table in the back of the party. While Grace was seated with the birthday girl, Brighton found Niles and CC and took a seat at their table.

"Having fun?" Niles asked the boy.

"Yep! I don't think anyone has picked up on the fact that I'm not technically a guest at this party. Everyone just keeps giving me tokens!" Brighton cackled a little evilly, and the adults couldn't help but laugh.

"So today you've managed one of the best insults I've ever heard directed at an older boy at the baseball game, and now you're scamming innocent people out of arcade tokens," Niles remarked. "Miss Babcock, he may have spent the most time around me while growing up, but you've had a profound influence on him as well."

CC shrugged innocently, secretly pleased with herself.

"So how'd the air hockey game go?" Brighton asked. "I saw you guys playing. I was gonna come over and watch, but it looked pretty intense."

"Miss Babcock won," Niles said.

"Niles might have let me win," CC added.

"I doubt it. Did you ever see him play Candy Land with us? He's ruthless," Brighton said with a slight shudder.

"If you say so," CC said, remaining unconvinced.

A spotlight came shining down on the stage, and everyone's attention turned to the opening curtains. Chuck E. Cheese and all his animatronic animal friends began singing a song. Brighton took this as his cue to pull out his Gameboy.

"Is this a hallucination from when I hit my head earlier?" CC asked.

"I wish," Niles said, rubbing his temples.

CC groaned as the singing got louder and louder. "I wish I could hit my head again and remain unconscious for this whole thing."

"Go play Whack-A-Mole with Brighton; I'm sure it could be arranged," Niles offered.

"Don't tempt me," CC said.

They watched the show in barely contained horror, when finally the last song began: Happy Birthday. Everyone joined in singing to the birthday girl, and after some applause, the curtains closed; the show was finally over.

"Oh, thank god!" CC and Niles exclaimed at the same time.

Brighton looked up from his Gameboy. "That's probably why they do cake after the show. You need a reward for sitting through that torture."

Sure enough, three slices of ice cream cake were passed back to their table, and all three of them dug in ravenously.

"Niles, these sweatpants are dangerous. They're the perfect pants to wear when you want to overeat," CC said as she sank back in her chair.

"And yet you didn't finish all of your cake," Niles said.

CC glanced down at her empty plate. "What? Yes I did!"

"Not the part that ended up on your nose," Niles said, his eyes twinkling.

CC held a hand up to her nose and pulled back, blushing slightly. "Oh god, let me go wash up."

She got up and darted to the restroom, and Niles laughed to himself.

"So," Brighton started, looking somewhat mischievous. "You two have had fun today."

"We've made the best out of what could have been a truly awful day," Niles said carefully.

"Yeah, I guess that's one way to put it," Brighton said, looking unconvinced.

"What's another way to put it?" Niles asked against his better judgment.

"Flirting," Brighton answered as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Niles stared at the boy for a moment before handing over the rest of his tokens. "Go play until we're ready to leave."

"No problem! I get it; you guys want some alone time." Brighton wagged his eyebrows suggestively and took off for the arcade, leaving Niles to sit and ponder what the boy said.

\* \* \*

><p>CC finished washing her hands and face and was just about to exit the ladies' room when the door swung open and Grace came in.<p>

"Oh, hi there, Grace. Having fun?" she asked the little girl.

"Not as much fun as you and Niles have been having," Grace replied.

CC did a double take. "Excuse me?"

"Oh, come on, Miss Babcock! You've been flirting all day!" Grace smiled up at the woman.

CC thought for a moment. She knew Grace was right; they had been flirting all day. She just didn't think it would have been obvious to a small child.

"Iâ€|Niles and I have a, well, a complicated relationship. It's not necessarilyâ€" CC tried to explain to the girl, but words failed her. The truth was she didn't know how to describe her relationship with Niles. Usually they just insulted each other, but they always seemed to enjoy it. But throughout the day, things seemed to have changed between them, and it wasn't just insults. It was teasing. It was laughing at each other's jokes. It was little touches here and here. It was stealing glances at one another when they were sure the other wasn't looking.

It was flirting.

Grace cut her off, saving her from having to explain herself. "He's been flirting with you, too, you know."

"He has?" CC asked, unable to help herself.

"Yep. He's sitting at the table by himself right now, too, so you better get back out there," the little girl smiled impishly.

CC stared at the girl for a beat before reaching into her pockets and handing her the rest of her tokens. "Go play until it's time to leave."

"You got it!" Grace exclaimed. CC followed her out of the bathroom and watched her run up to her brother. The two chattered excitedly for a moment before glancing over at CC.

CC shook her head in amusement and headed back to the table. She was almost back to her seat when she heard Caroline Blake talking with a couple other socialites CC knew. She backed up behind a wall when she realized it was her they were talking about.

"Well, the woman has clearly lost her mind. Sweatpants, a baggy t-shirt, pearls, and heels? What was she thinking? It's not as if she's very attractive to begin with. She certainly should be dressing better to distract from all that."

"Her sister is having a big get together tonight, and CC wasn't even invited. Now I know why. What an embarrassment to the Babcock family."

"And did you hear what a nightmare she is to work with? She sent the

set designer to the hospital! The woman is a lunatic. The only reason Maxwell puts up with her is because of her family's money."

"She can't be that much of a nightmare. I mean we all know how she got the job working for Maxwell in the first place, and trust me it wasn't just because of her family's moneyâ€|"

"Right. There's a reason Maxwell's office desk is so big and roomy underneath. It's so CC could fit under there on her knees."

The women cackled, and CC's heart sank. She tucked her hair behind her ears, unsure of what to do next. She leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes, praying that lightning would strike her and she would disintegrate into ashes that some pimply-faced janitor would sweep up later at closing time.

Suddenly, she heard Niles' voice enter the conversation. "Excuse me, ladies, I couldn't help but overhear what you were talking about."

This was it, CC realized. This would be when Niles let her down; he probably had a whole arsenal of insults at the ready to make the snobby women laugh at her misfortune.

"And you are?" one of the women asked.

"That's Maxwell Sheffield's butler," Caroline explained.

"Yes, so as you can see, I spend a lot of time with CC Babcock. And let me tell you, you couldn't be more wrong about her."

CC opened her eyes and her head snapped up.

"CC Babcock is a tough-as-nails, intelligent, funny, charming woman who could and would run circles around you mindless nitwits. She's responsible for most of the success of Sheffield Productions and she'll be responsible for you, Mrs. Blake, doubling-no, no, tripling your investments into their latest production. And she certainly did not do it on her knees. She worked her ass off to get to where she is today, and never once relied on her parents' fortune to get ahead. And she never once got ahead by getting on her knees, as you so classily put it."

He paused to take a deep breath before continuing. "And as for your comments about her looks, well, let me just say that even in sweatpants, she is more breathtakingly beautiful than all of you loathsome cows combined."

The women gasped, completely appalled by Niles' comments. "With that said, please wish your daughter a happy birthday, Mrs. Blake. I think we'll be leaving now."

He rounded the corner and nearly bumped into CC. They stared at each other for a moment, countless emotions and questions playing on their faces, before Niles finally spoke. "Come on, Babs. Let's blow this popsicle stand."

He held out a hand, and she smiled gratefully and took it, leaning a head on his shoulder as they strode purposefully toward the exit. Niles motioned for the children, who quickly ran and caught up with



them. Sensing something must have happened, the children didn't complain about having to leave early or ask what was wrong.

They got to the car, and Niles let the kids in. Once he shut the door, CC squeezed his hand and let go. "Thank you, Niles."

"It was nothing, Miss Babcock."

"It was not nothing. Itâ€¦meant a lot to me," she admitted.

"Well," Niles said as he went over to the driver's side of the car. "No one picks on my Babcock but me."

"Your Babcock, huh?" CC asked, her teasing smile growing wider as she realized Niles was blushing. She propped an elbow on the hood of the car and rested her chin on her hand, staring at him thoughtfully.

"It's just an expression," Niles said. CC raised an eyebrow at him. "Erm, well, anyway, should I take you back to your apartment, or are you coming home with us?"

"Considering I have no way of getting into my apartment, I think I'll be going home with you."

They both knew it was a flimsy excuse, that CC could have easily gotten a doorman or security guard to let her into her apartment.

"Alright then," Niles said.

Both adults slid into their seats and shut the car doors at the same time, missing the satisfied smiles on each other's faces.

## 10. Chapter 10

**\*\*Here we go: the last chapter! I'm sad to see it end. This fic got me through a very weird, uncertain time in my life and I will miss its company. Thank you all for reading and reviewing! And again thank you to Jilian (aFineMess5) for being the best friend ever. I cannot wait to meet my new little BFF: Chastity Claire Kate Babcock.\*\***

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Chapter 10<strong>:

They arrived back at the mansion, CC having decided to let Chester spend the night at the doggy hotel.

"Are you sure you wouldn't rather stay there as well? I bet they do an excellent flea bath," Niles said.

"The only annoying pest I have to worry about is the one sitting next to me in this car," CC said, patting him on the cheek.

"Guys?" Brighton said from the backseat. "Gracie's asleep."

They turned around to look at Grace, and sure enough the little girl

was out cold, her little forehead pressed against the window.

"I'll get her," CC said. "You two go work on a way of lifting Brighton up into a window."

"Cool," Brighton said as he and the adults exited the car. CC went around to the backseat, while Niles and Brighton headed to the front of the mansion to strategize a plan for breaking and entering their own home.

She picked the little girl up easily enough, and Grace rested her head on CC's shoulder. She closed the car door with her hip and met the other two out front.

"We could break a window?" Niles suggested to the boy. "And then I could lift you through, and you could come unlock the door. Oh, that won't do."

"Because the alarm will go off?" CC guessed.

"I was going to say because then he would have to crawl through broken glass, but I'm glad that's where your mind is at, Babs."

CC shrugged him off, careful not to jostle the sleeping child in her arms.

"This is useless. We're never getting inside," Brighton said, taking a seat next to a decorative rock on the front steps. Suddenly, the boy visibly paled, and he looked up at the adults guiltily.

"Unlessâ€¦"

"What?" CC and Niles asked at the same time.

"Unless we use the spare key kept under this rock that I forgot about til just now," Brighton said sheepishly as he tilted over the rock and, sure enough, found a spare key on the ground, glistening like a hidden buried treasure.

A stunned silence swept over everyone. Niles' jaw dropped as he stared at the rock. CC closed her eyes and counted to ten very slowly in her head.

"Did you know about this?" she asked Niles.

"He didn't," Brighton answered for him. "Fran came up with the idea soon after she moved in, in case she ever lost her keys, or in case Sylvia wanted to come over for a late night snack. Dad doesn't like the idea of hiding keys because of burglars, so we kept it secret. I'm really sorry."

He held up the key, an apologetic expression on his face, and Niles took it from him, still looking slightly stunned. It was CC's snort of laughter that snapped him out of it.

"I'm sorryâ€¦I justâ€¦I can't believe this day we've hadâ€¦andâ€¦andâ€¦and," she paused to catch her breath and scoot Gracie up in her arms. "And it was all completely avoidable!"

Niles couldn't help it; he started laughing, too. "Your whole set got destroyed! Brighton got a grape stuck up his nose! You passed out!"

You blew your interview! You almost got hit by a car!"

The laughter was bordering on hysterical, and when Grace stirred in CC's arms, she snapped out of it. "Sorry," she whispered to the girl. "Let's just get inside," she said, wiping the tears of laughter from her eyes with her spare hand.

Niles opened the door, but stopped her before she could take a step inside. "What's this?" he asked, leaning down and picking up an envelope that had gone through the mail slot in the door. He inspected it and then looked up at CC. "It has your name on it; it's from Melanie Parker."

"It's probably just a copy of the article so I'm forewarned before it's published," CC said, brushing it off. "I'll read it after I get Grace to bed."

"You don't have to do that, Miss Babcock."

"I know, but I want to, so just lead the way, Jeeves."

He held the door open for her and Brighton.

"So, should we put the key back under the rock?" Brighton asked as he walked by Niles. Niles merely stared back. "Nevermind."

Niles rolled his eyes good-naturedly. "Just go put your pajamas on and get into bed. I'll be in momentarily to see if you need anything."

The boy obliged, bounding up the steps two at a time.

"C'mon, Miss Babcock," Niles said as he motioned toward CC. "I'll show you to Miss Grace's room. Are you sure you don't want me to take her?"

"I got her," CC said with a shake of her head.

She followed him up to the little girl's room and carefully deposited Grace onto the bed. Sitting down next to her, she removed the girl's shoes, causing her to once again stir.

Grace sat up, rubbing her eyes sleepily. "Miss Babcock?"

"Shh, you're at home and in bed," CC whispered. "Do you want to get into your pajamas?"

The little girl nodded. CC looked to Niles for help. He opened a drawer and tossed her a pair.

"Here you go," CC said, handing the pajamas to Grace.

"Will you tuck me in when I'm ready?" the little girl asked in a small voice.

"Of course," CC said, getting up and walking out of the room with Niles. She shut the door and leaned against it, glancing at the butler curiously. "You know, you could move on to the boy—see if he needs anything."

"I could," he nodded. "But just in case you or Miss Grace need anything, I figured I should stick around."

"Mmhmm," CC murmured, knowing very well he just wanted to see her put the girl to bed.

"Are you tired? Do you want me to show you to the guest room after this?" he asked.

"Niles, it's 8:00 at night," she said with a teasing grin.

"Oh, right," he rubbed his face. "Forgive me, it's been a long day. Perhaps a stiff drink once the children are in bed?"

"Mmm, I like the sound of that."

They smiled at each other for a brief moment, before Grace called out that she was ready. CC opened the door and sat down on the side of the bed, where the little girl was already settled beneath the blankets. Niles turned the light off and switched the nightlight on, leaning against the doorframe.

"Well," CC said as she tucked the blankets in around the girl. "Did you have a good day?"

"Sure did," Grace mumbled tiredly. "You know, Miss Babcock, this morning I was prepared for the worst."

"So was I," CC admitted.

"But I had a lot of fun with you," Grace said with a smile as her eyes fluttered shut.

"I had a lot of fun with you, too, Grace," CC whispered, brushing the hair back from the child's forehead. "Good night."

She got up and crept out of the room with Niles. After a pit stop at the bathroom to get the boy a cup of water, they went to Brighton's room. The boy was already curled up under the covers when CC sat down next to him on the edge of the bed.

"Here's your water," Niles said, placing it on the boy's nightstand.

"Thanks," he said, reaching for the cup and taking a big gulp before placing it back where it was. "Sorry again about the key, guys. I completely forgot."

"It's fine," CC said. "This day wasn't completely terrible."

Brighton grinned. "It was pretty fun, wasn't it? But uh, I was wondering if we could keep the whole grape fiasco from my dad."

"He'll see the insurance bill," Niles reminded him.

"Aw man," the boy groaned, flopping his head back on the pillows.

"We could just say he got a splinter or something," CC suggested.

Brighton lifted his head up. "I like the sound of that!"

"Fine," Niles relented.

"You guys are the best," Brighton pumped his fist in the air. "Feel free to watch us whenever my dad's out of town."

CC raised an eyebrow at the boy.

"Oh, and if Fran can't already watch us, of course," he added guiltily.

"Of course," she repeated sarcastically.

"You're not gonna tell her I said that, are you?" he asked nervously.

"No, no of course not," CC said patronizingly. "Good night, Brighton," she said with a grin and a quick ruffle of his hair before getting up and leaving the room.

"She's totally gonna tell Fran isn't she?" Brighton asked Niles.

"Oh yeah," Niles said, shutting off the light. "Good night!"

The two adults trudged down the stairs to the living room, CC grabbing the envelope from the table, taking her shoes off, and plopping down on the couch, her feet tucked beneath her. Niles headed straight for the minibar and poured two glasses of whiskey before joining her on the couch.

"Thanks," she murmured, taking the glass from him, her eyes still on the envelope.

"Aren't you going to open it?"

"What? Oh," CC said, shaking herself out of her reverie and tossing the envelope down on the coffee table. "Not yet. Alcohol first."

The clinked glasses and took generous sips of their drinks before leaning forward and simultaneously placing their glasses on the coffee table. Niles reached for the remote control and turned the TV, mindlessly flipping through the channels. One station in particular caught his eye and he left it on, laughing in utter amazement.

"Oh, you have got to be kidding me," CC groaned as Maria and the von Trapp children danced around the bedroom singing all about their favorite things.

"Maybe it's a sign?" Niles offered. "You know, after the terrible day you had, the show must go on? Something like that?"

"Aw, look at you, feeding me utter crap to lift my spirits," CC smiled gratefully. "But after beating up the set designer twice, destroying the entire von Trapp Mansion scenery, and blowing the one interview that may have saved me and my career, I think this," she motioned to the television, "is just karma laughing in my

face."

"Well," Niles said, turning the television off and reaching for the envelope. "You'll never know unless you read what's inside."

She gave him a long stare before reluctantly taking the envelope from him. "Fine." She tore it open and pulled out a small sheet of paper. "'\_Dear CC, I just wanted you to have a copy before it went to print. I'm sure you'll understand why I wrote what I wrote. Ciao darling, Melanie.\_' Oh god, I can't read this. Here," she thrust the envelope into Niles' hands. "You read it for me."

"Me? Are you sure?"

CC nodded. He took a quick sip of his whiskey, and she did the same, though this time instead of placing the glass back on the table, she cradled it in her hands to keep from wringing them nervously.

"Okay, here goes," Niles said, clearing his throat and pulling out the article. "'\_I have known CC Babcock for many years, and I can say from firsthand experience that The Bitch of Broadway is an accurate title for the woman. She is a no-nonsense, tough-as-nails businesswoman who demands perfection from her employees and in return produces perfection for her audiences.\_'" He paused to look at her, and she motioned for him to continue, her face expressionless.

"'\_Recently, Miss Babcock has come into the headlines for a public feud with famed set designer Jack Taylor. Mr. Taylor took to the press to condemn Miss Babcock for her abuse of him. What Mr. Taylor left out, however, is that he continuously disobeyed Miss Babcock's orders, and when confronted on the matter, he made extremely sexist, misogynistic comments directed at Miss Babcock. Their more recent feud occurred today, at the time of writing this article, when Mr. Taylor threatened to strike a little girl, and Miss Babcock defended her.\_' \_So far so good, right?" Niles asked with a hopeful grin.

"Keep reading, keep reading!" CC said, putting her glass on the table and then hitting him excitedly.

"Okay, okay, no need to assault me!" Niles said with laughter in his voice. "'\_The real test of CC Babcock's character came today during our interview. The interview was meant to restore Miss Babcock's image, to fix this mess Mr. Taylor started. However, Miss Babcock cut the interview short, as she was babysitting a little boy and made a promise to him that she would be his good luck charm at his baseball game. We at Playbill have nothing but admiration for Miss CC Babcock and her actions, and when we call her The Bitch of Broadway, we do it with the utmost respect.\_' \_That's it," Niles said, folding up the article and stuffing it back in the envelope. "You did it, Miss Babcock!" oomph."

CC cut him off by launching herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "My career isn't over!" she exclaimed.

"Far from it," Niles said into her ear. "The public will be crazy about you after reading that article."

She pulled back a little bit, though she stayed half in his lap and

left her hands on his shoulders. "And how do you feel about me after reading that article?"

"It didn't tell me anything I didn't already know," he admitted, looking deep into her eyes.

"Oh, good answer," she whispered before she crashed her lips down onto his, and he pulled her fully on top of him. She smiled into his mouth as she felt his hands come up to caress her bottom, and the smile turned to a gasp as he ground up into her, leaving no mistaking for how aroused he was.

She broke the kiss, and his lips immediately trailed down her jaw and neck. "Well, Niles, I think I'm going to be getting off to bed now." She slid off of him and stood up, grinning at his mussed hair and stunned expression.

"Huh," he managed before he collected himself, trying to be the proper gentleman he was trained to be. "Oh, of course. Good night, Miss Babcock."

CC shook her head and smiled teasingly as she fingered the end of her t-shirt. "But first, I guess I should return this to you. It was so kind of you to lend it to me."

Niles seemed to catch on, his eyes once again glazing over in lust, and he nodded. "Yes, returning it would be the polite thing to do," he agreed.

She pulled the shirt over her head and tossed it at him, standing there before him in her white lacy bra, pearls, and his sweatpants. "Well, good night, Niles."

She sauntered away, her hips swaying seductively, when his voice in her ear stopped her. "Oh, CC, I think you're forgetting something?"

She turned around, pleased to find him standing right before her and looking at her expectantly. "Oh?"

"You borrowed my pants, too, remember?"

She pretended to consider his words for a moment. "You're right. What on earth are we going to do about this?"

He pulled her flush against his chest and kissed her thoroughly. "I guess I'll just have to help you out of them," he whispered.

"I guess you will," she agreed.

And so Niles took CC by the hand and started to lead her upstairs, when the phone rang. He cursed under his breath, let go of her hand and jogged to the phone.

"Sheffield Residence? Oh, sir, hello," Niles said a little breathlessly. "Me? No I'm fine, I was just uh, working out. Treadmill," he paused to glare at CC who snorted from the stairs, an amused expression on her face.

"The children are fine. They're both upstairs in bed, sound asleep.

I'll have them call you in the morning"no, no I'm not rushing you off the phone," he clenched his fist in frustration. "Yes, I'm sure you're having a wonderful time with Miss Fine and Miss Margaret."

A pair of sweatpants hit him in the head. He bent over to pick up the dark, gray pair, recognizing them immediately. He looked up, and there stood CC on the stairs, clad only in her lacy white bra and matching underwear. She smiled flirtatiously and crooked her finger for him to follow her.

"Yes, Master Brighton had a good game today and now if you'll excuse me, sir, I have to hop back on the treadmill. We'll see you sometime this weekend! Goodbye!"

Niles slammed the phone down and rushed up the stairs, his lips once again crashing down onto CC's, his hands tracing the outline of her body, coming to rest on the backs of her thighs. He felt her knees weaken, and he pulled her up into his arms, her legs wrapping around his waist, his hands cupping her bottom.

CC broke the kiss in surprise. "Niles," she said appreciatively, her kiss-swollen lips curling into a satisfied smile. She ran her hands up his chest before linking them behind his neck.

"Who needs a bloody treadmill," Niles said panting, his voice thick with arousal.

CC laughed a deep, throaty laugh before leaning down to kiss him again. They clumsily made their way to Niles' room, bumping into walls and knocking over potted plants, their lips never breaking contact.

\_One fine day, you'll look at me  
>And you will know our love was meant to be<br>One fine day, you're gonna want me for your girl\_

\* \* \*

><p><strong>Author's Note Part 2: Spoiler alert - In the movie, the main characters kiss once then fall asleep on the couch together at the end. I didn't have the heart to end it that way.<strong>

End  
file.